Boy of the Desert

Eunice Tietjens

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The camel would not get up.

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Boy of the Desert

by
Eunice Tietjens

illustrated by
Will Hollingsworth

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FOURTH IMPRESSION

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO MARSHALL

MY SON, AND ABDUL AZIZ' FRIEND

HOW TO PRONOUNCE THE ARAB NAMES

The Arabic *a* is pronounced like the *a* in *father*, and *i* is pronounced like *ee*.

Abdul Aziz should be *Ab'-dul A-zeez'*
Kadijah should be *Ka-dee'-jah*
Ouled ben Idress should be *Oo'-led ben Ee'-dress*
Sidi Bou Ali should be *See'-dee Boo A'-lee*, etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS

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BOY OF THE DESERT

The journey of Abdul-Aziz.

CHAPTER I

ABDUL AZIZ was an Arab.

Now to be an Arab is a fine thing, a thing to be proud of; and Abdul Aziz was proud, like all his race. To be sure he had never done much himself. His pride was on general principles. Just as certain young persons at home are proud to be Americans and not "foreigners," and certain other young persons are proud to be English and not American, and certain young Italians are proud to be Italian and not English, and certain young Japanese are proud to be Japanese and not "white"—just so Abdul Aziz reflected with pleasure that he was an Arab. Already at six, when this story begins, his nose was growing out, straight and high and

hawk-like, his head was set proudly on his straight strong little body, and his mouth was dark and full of pride.

Especially Abdul Aziz was proud not to be French. This may seem strange to you because, if you have looked in the dictionary under "Arab" you have probably found that an Arab is "a native of Arabia," and Arabia has nothing to do with France or the French. Once, it is true, all the Arabs lived in Arabia, just as many of them live there still. But many centuries ago the Arabs conquered and overflowed Asia Minor, Egypt, North Africa and even Spain; so that today you can find Arabs living in all these places.

Abdul Aziz, as it happened, lived in Tunisia in North Africa, and Tunisia is a French protectorate, which means that France really governs the country, in spite of the Arab ruler, called the Bey, with his palaces and his soldiers and his wives and his music.

So the village where Abdul Aziz lived, which is called Hammamet, is also governed by the French. There are French laws, and a French post-office, with that queer instrument the telephone, and, outside the village itself, French

Hammamet.

roads and French houses where certain French people live.

Especially there lived, in one of these houses, a little French boy named Jules who, oddly enough, was just as proud to be French as Abdul Aziz was to be Arab. They went to the same school outside the village and most of the time they got on famously, as boys do. But once in a while they would get angry with one another. Then Jules would call Abdul Aziz a "dog of an Arab," and Abdul Aziz would get very red and answer by calling Jules a "pig of a Roumi," by which he meant a foreigner. All this was most impolite and not very sensible, but we can all understand it, because we have all done something of the sort ourselves.

The village however was entirely Arab. In it the people lived as their forefathers had lived for hundreds of years, and once inside the walls you could forget that such people as the French ever existed. Just so, when you read this story, you can forget most of the time that there are any French people in Tunisia. Most of the time—but not all.

Abdul Aziz then, one afternoon when he was

six or thereabouts, was coming home from school. Under one arm he held a school sack made of bright-colored matting, and in the other hand he held some ripe dates, which he was munching contentedly. School was finished for the day and he was at peace with the world.

As he trudged along the road he came in sight of the flat white roofs of the village and the gray-brown, tumble-down wall that surrounds them. He looked at these things without seeing them, as we all look at things we know too well. But at the foot of the wall he saw something that made him look again more carefully.

It was Amor ben Nila's huge bad-tempered camel. He recognized it at once, because it was quite the biggest anywhere about, and one day it had bitten a man and taken out a great three-cornered piece of flesh, so that the wound took many months to heal. Abdul Aziz wasn't exactly afraid of it, but he usually went a good way around its mouth!

Camels in general Abdul Aziz knew as well as most of us know dogs. He had this very afternoon passed half a dozen of them on his way home from school—as well as three donkeys, two

goats, several cows and a flock of sheep. But somehow he never could get used to camels. Their queer humps and queerer knees, their great shaggy necks with the little heads at the end of them, always struck him as funny. He had an idea too that the camels knew they were funny, because their lips seemed always to be smiling at something, and what could that something be except themselves?

Amor ben Nila's camel had its front legs tied together. Amor must have gone into the village and left it hobbled outside here, so it could get a bite to eat. It could hardly walk this way. First it tried walking in the ordinary way, moving one foot and then the other. But the rope was so short that it could only go two or three inches at a time. Then it would heave itself awkwardly up on its hind legs, rocking like a boat in a high sea, and stretching its neck out straight in front of it. It would throw its front legs forward both together and let itself rock forward onto them, coming down *thump*, something like a dislocated kangaroo. Abdul Aziz stopped in the road and laughed.

All the time the camel was bubbling with rage.

If you have never seen a camel bubble you have missed one of the funniest sights and sounds in the world. They only do it in the winter time, when the cold makes them uncomfortable, and they seem to do it just for themselves. A dog growls because it sees something it doesn't like, or because it wants to warn you to leave it alone. But a camel never seems to notice anything outside itself, and it bubbles just as it smiles, to itself, the way a radiator blows off steam. And it goes on solemnly doing whatever it is doing all the while it is bubbling.

Amor's camel, in order to bubble, had let down out of the side of its mouth a long red bladder, like a second tongue, and had blown this bladder up with air. It was covered with a white froth like soap-suds that dripped down as the beast champed; and from its throat came the most comical bubbling roar you can imagine, something like a lion roaring, and something like a man swearing under his breath. Abdul Aziz laughed again.

Now all this time the camel was slowly but surely drawing nearer in this awkward way to the outer gate that gives on to the open space in front of the village. On one side of the open space is a

café, where wise-looking Arabs sit for hours at a time drinking coffee, or talking, or just sitting still. On the other side is the real gate of the village. This gate is a low arched gateway in the wall, not much higher than a man's head, and not much wider than a man can reach with his arms spread out. Everyone who goes into the village goes in by this gate, unless he wants to walk a long way and come in by the "women's gate" on the sea-shore at the other end. For Hammamet is a fishing village, set on the shore of the blue Mediterranean Sea.

The camel, for some camelish reason of his own, hobbled and rocked across the open space, which just then was deserted except for an Arab or two on the benches of the café, and finally fetched up with its back exactly against the village gate. Its hump was much too big to get through the arch, and as for its head, it hung in the air far above the top. So it didn't try to go through the gate, but put its back against it, spread its legs wide apart, and gave a most tremendous bubble that could be heard all across town. So there it stood, for all the world like Horatius holding the bridge against the enemy. Only there was no

enemy, only the white sunlight on the yellow sand of the open space, and the deep quiet of a peaceful afternoon in the land of peace.

Abdul Aziz had followed the camel into the open space and stood watching. He had decided not to go into the village just then. As he stood a man passed him, going towards the gate—and the camel. But the man wasn't looking at the camel, he was looking at Abdul Aziz, and he smiled with friendly blue eyes as he passed. The boy decided then and there that he liked him.

The man was not an Arab. He was dressed in western clothes and under one arm he held a bundle of sticks with a strap around them and a piece of stretched canvas. In the other hand he had a big brown wooden box. Abdul Aziz didn't know what these were for, but he did see that they would be in the way when the man met the camel.

In a minute this happened. The man stopped and looked up with surprise at the great beast bubbling in the gateway. Then he grinned. But the camel didn't think it at all funny. He took a hobbling step forward and gave another huge roar. He looked so fierce that the man was forced to step backward. Then he turned suddenly to-

Like Horatius at the bridge.

wards Abdul Aziz and the two of them burst into a merry peal of laughter, like an ocean wave and a little waterfall laughing together. From that moment they were fast friends.

"*Astenna!*" said Abdul Aziz, which is Arabic for "wait a minute." Quickly he ran back outside the wall and returned in a moment holding gingerly two fat leaves of cactus. One leaf grew out of the end of the other, and they were both so prickly with spines that they looked like fat pincushions. Abdul Aziz held them out to the camel.

"Here, friend!" he said.

The camel looked at them, and decided that after all it was better to eat than to play Horatius. Very seriously, with an immense dignity, it opened its huge mouth, drew in the frothy bladder, and began to chew on the cactus. The spines went right through its tongue and its thick smiling lips, but it never noticed them at all. On the contrary it seemed to be enjoying itself immensely. While it was munching, the man thwacked it on the neck and it moved heavily away. Abdul Aziz and his new friend slipped under the arch and came into the streets of the village.

The houses of the village were all white, dazzling white in the sunlight. In the narrow streets between them were sharp shadows. The houses were like white square or oblong boxes, set one beside the other. They were all one story high, and their roofs were as flat as tables. Mostly they had only a single door in their white walls, but once in a while, high up, there was a window covered with a tight blue lattice-work, so that the hidden women could look out without being seen.

Abdul Aziz trotted beside the man up the street. Presently his friend stopped, squinted along the way a moment, then began to untie the sticks. He unfolded them into an easel, set the canvas on it, opened the brown box and took out a paint-box and a palette. The boy watched, fascinated.

"Now!" said the man in excellent Arabic, though with a foreign accent, "to work! Watch if you like." And the boy, being like most Arabs not very talkative, watched in silence. Under the man's swift pencil he watched the white houses of the village take shape on the canvas. He saw the man squeeze little blobs of paint on the palette, and watched him make a quick sketch in

color. Other people passed and stopped a minute, but they went on. Only the boy stayed. So an hour passed—an hour and a half. Then the man sighed, and began to put away his brushes, still looking at the canvas.

"It should be better!" he said aloud to himself.

"But it is wonderful!" answered the boy.

The artist, who seemed to have forgotten the boy, turned quickly towards him and smiled again his blue-eyed smile. "Thank you, my son," he said.

Now Abdul Aziz put a question which he had been pondering for a long while.

"What sort of a Roumi, a foreigner, are you?" he asked. The man looked at him quickly.

"What kind? No kind especially. Just a man."

"But you must be French, or Italian, or—or something," said Abdul Aziz, who was not quite sure what the other foreigners were. "Everybody comes from somewhere."

"I come from everywhere, and nowhere," said the man solemnly. He began to wipe up the little blobs of paint. "Pictures are for every place, and art has no time."

Abdul Aziz looked at him in surprise, wondering if he were a little crazy. There was a crazy man in the village, whom everyone respected, and pitied. But the man didn't look at all crazy. On the other hand he put a question in his turn.

"You are an Arab?"

"Of course!" said Abdul Aziz.

"Would you rather be something else?"

This was a silly question. The boy gasped and answered sturdily, "By Allah, no!"

The man smiled. "That is right. The Arabs are a great people. Long ago, for a century, they were the leaders of the world. They founded a great religion, the religion of the prophet Mohammed. They were splendid soldiers and fine men of science. They were great poets. They did fine things in mathematics and medicine and they studied the stars. Almost every language today uses Arabic words for certain of these things. You are right to be proud, you who are an Arab." Abdul Aziz felt his heart swell with pleasure, even if he didn't understand all the big words.

Then the man sighed again and went on in a different voice. "But they are not today as great as they once were. They have forgotten. They

grow lazy. You must help them to be great again," and he looked straight into Abdul Aziz' brown eyes with his blue ones.

The boy's heart skipped a beat with pride and resolve. "I will, I will help them when I grow up!" he said. Then he added scornfully, "I am glad I am not French, like Jules!"

But at this his new friend frowned suddenly, disconcertingly.

"There you are wrong!" he said sharply. "You should be proud to be an Arab, but not proud not to be French. The French are a great people too, with a great history behind them. There are many great peoples in the world—and they can all be your friends."

He looked more gently at the boy who, being only six or thereabouts was now nearly ready to cry. "What did you tell me your name was?"

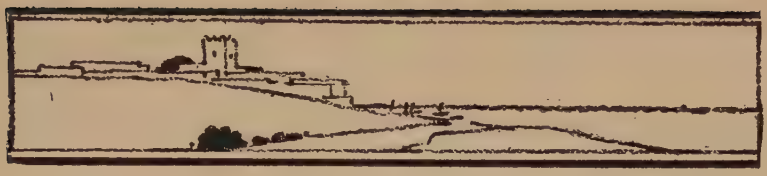
"I didn't tell you, but it's Abdul Aziz."

"Do you know what that name means?"

"It means 'Servant of the Beloved God,' " answered the boy promptly. "Right!" said the artist. "You must live up to your name. A servant of Allah must serve his people too. Help them, little Abdul Aziz!"

The paints were put away now, and the easel tied up. The man's manner changed again, and the smile came back. "Look here!" he said, and he took from his pocket a piece of French chocolate. He pressed it into the boy's hand—and was gone.

So Abdul Aziz met a bubbling camel, and made a friend. And so he first began really to think.



CHAPTER II

FOR a long time after the artist had left him Abdul Aziz stood in the white street, which was paved with yellow sand, munching the chocolate. He could not have told you why he stood there, but he felt very good inside, and brave, and he liked the feeling. So he didn't move.

After a while, however, he saw coming toward him in the narrow space a large bundle of brown cloth. The bundle was no shape particularly, just a great lump; but below it were two plump bare feet, and on each foot was a heavy silver anklet. The bottom of the feet and the toes were stained a dark red, almost black, with kohl and henna. Near the top of the bundle too, below a roundish place which might have been the top of a head, was a peep-hole, hardly bigger than a silver dollar, and by looking very carefully one could just see a single black eye looking out of this hole. No little western boy would have had the slight-

est idea who could be inside the bundle, but Abdul Aziz knew perfectly well. It was his mother.

His mother was named Kadijah, after the wife of the Prophet Mohammed, and Abdul Aziz adored her. If they had lived in a city, or if they had been very rich people, his mother would never have been allowed to go on the street at all, even in a bundle, except to the mosque on Friday—which is the Arab Sunday—or to weddings and funerals, or once a week to the hammam baths. But they were village people and his father was a sensible man. So once in a long time his mother was allowed to go up the street to the house of his father's father, Abdul Aziz' grandfather. She was coming home now from such a visit.

Seeing her suddenly in the street, the boy would have liked to go up to her and give her a big hug—he wasn't yet a very big boy—but that would not have been polite at all. So he just looked at her and waited till she came up with him. She didn't stop, but the one eye in the peephole looked at him with a smile and he heard her voice, very muffled under all that cloth, saying;

A large bundle of brown cloth.

"Come home, little son. The sun will soon be setting."

Abdul Aziz looked up then and saw that she was right. It was winter time and although it was quite warm, so that the vegetables were growing in the gardens outside the village, and the roses and the fruit trees were blooming, it got dark just as early as it does in America or in England in winter. The sun set across the bay behind the blue mountain, and almost as soon as his red disk disappeared it grew quite dark. There was hardly any twilight at all. So Abdul Aziz followed his mother home, still munching the last of the chocolate.

He went quite slowly, so that when he got in his mother had already folded up the brown cloth she had been wrapped in—it was twice as big as a blanket—and was bending over a small canoun, or fire-pot, in the courtyard. The pot was of dark-colored pottery with little holes in the bottom and was filled with glowing charcoal. It was what they used instead of a kitchen stove.

Abdul Aziz' house, like all Arab houses, was built around a courtyard which was open to the sky. The doors of the two rooms opened on to this

courtyard. Upstairs they had two more rooms where they lived in the summer time. In the winter they just used them to store things in. The door to the street opened off the courtyard. Many Arab men, when they go out, lock this door and take the key with them, so as to be very sure their wives do not gad about to the neighbors. But Abdul Aziz' father left it unlocked.

The father was named Sadoc. He was a merchant and had a little shop in the souk—the market—where he sold vegetables and olive oil and other things to eat. He was an honest man and he worked hard, which the Arabs do not always do, for the artist had spoken truth when he said that the Arabs of today grow lazy. The sheik, who is something like the mayor of the village and the chief of police combined, used to say that if all the men were like Sadoc he would have no trouble at all.

Abdul Aziz loved his father and respected him; but he was a little afraid of him too. When his father told him to do something he did it right away, without dawdling. He knew that if he didn't his father would give him a good cuff on the ear, much as a bear cuffs a cub, and he didn't

like this. But he knew too that his father was a just man who never punished him unless he deserved it.

This evening when he came in he saw that his mother was cooking a cous-cous for dinner. This is the great Arab dish and Abdul Aziz was as fond of it as we are of roast turkey. The cous-cous itself is a white grain, ground usually from wheat, and it looks much like farina or cream of wheat. The women spread it out in flat trays of basket-work and roll it with their hands, adding water to it, till it sticks together in little balls about the size of a grain of rice. Then it is steamed and buttered and served with a great pile of meat and vegetables on top of it. An Arab will eat a dish of it the size of a soup-tureen all to himself!

While Abdul Aziz was sniffing the delightful odor his mother, who had been bending over the fire-pot, stood up and said.

"Come up on the roof and help me fold the bed-clothes. They have been airing but now it is growing dark."

So they climbed together the narrow white-washed stairs that ran up one side of the court-yard to the roof. These stairs, like the flat roof

itself, have no railing, and the Arab children learn very early, like small monkeys, to climb them and to play on the roof without falling. Abdul Aziz had climbed on them ever since he could toddle.

But this evening, for the first time in his life, Abdul Aziz forgot.

As he and his mother were folding the clothes he began to tell her about Amor ben Nila's bubbling camel, and he was so interested that he didn't look where he was stepping. Just as he got to the place where the camel was playing Horatius before the village gate he heard his mother give a warning cry. But it was too late. Abdul Aziz had stepped backwards off the roof.

As he fell he clutched tightly the blanket he was holding by one end, while his mother held the other end. For an instant his fingers kept their hold, and the blanket slid part way after him, while Kadijah took a step or two forward, screaming. But the blanket slipped through his fingers and he fell heavily to the courtyard below, and lay still.

The roof was fully twelve feet high, and the courtyard was paved with flag-stones. It seemed that the boy must be dead.

Fell heavily to the courtyard.

But Kismet—that fate in which the Arabs believe so thoroughly—wished it otherwise. As his mother ran screaming down the stairs his father came into the courtyard, and the two of them ran to pick up the small still figure, which lay in a heap with one brown arm spread over the red flag-stones.

But almost before they reached it the small figure gathered itself together, the breath which had been knocked out of him returned, and Abdul Aziz let out a roar of which the camel would have been proud.

When they had felt him all over and found that not even a bone was broken, and when his howls had subsided, Sadoc brought out the prayer rug and knelt to give thanks to Allah.

Then they sat down to eat the cous-cous.

"By Sidi Abdallah!" said Sadoc to his son, "I shall really be surprised if you grow up with all your eyes and ears and nose and toes! already you have stuck yourself full of cactus spines; you have made yourself sick eating unripe dates; you have got stepped on by Satan our donkey; you have tumbled into the cistern; you have been nearly smothered in a sand-slide; and now you

have fallen off the roof. All because you don't remember! Some day you will forget your head, and leave it in your desk at school. And that will be the end of you!"

Abdul Aziz, who had been much shaken by the fall and wasn't feeling very well yet, could only gulp. He was watching how skillfully his father ate the cous-cous. The Arabs don't eat with forks, nor spoons—except for soup—but use what nature gave them in the first place. Sadoc took some of the grain in the ends of his fingers, put it in the palm of his hand, squeezed it and moulded it into a ball and thrust it into his mouth. Any stray dirt that might be on his hand went in too of course, and watching him it was easy to see why the Prophet commanded that every Mohammedan should wash his hands five times a day! Abdul Aziz didn't think of the dirt though; he only noticed how skillfully Sadoc did it, so that not a grain was lost. The boy couldn't get it just right yet, and spilled on the low table. He was feeling very blue.

But his mother had been watching him and after dinner, when the things had been put away, she went and sat on the edge of the great bed

which filled the whole end of the room. It was painted in gay colors and it had heavy curtains of silk before it.

"Come, my son," said Kadijah, "and I will tell you a story about Sha'ah."

Now Sha'ah is a great character among the Arabs of Tunisia and hundreds of stories are told about him. He was supposed to have lived in the city of Tunis many years ago, and in the stories he is sometimes very smart, so that he outwits everybody else, and sometimes very simple, so that other people get the best of him. In this way one can never tell till a story is finished how it will turn out. Abdul Aziz adored stories about him, so he went over and cuddled up on the bed beside his mother. This is the story she told.

One day, in the long ago, Sha'ah was walking outside the city walls, leading his mule. He had been out to the country to get a load of fire-wood, and he had loaded the wood on the mule's back. Now he was leading the beast home up a long country road. There didn't seem to be any need of watching where he was going particularly, so Sha'ah had fallen into a brown study, thinking

hard of something, and was walking with his eyes on the ground.

But it happened that two thieves were sitting beside the road, and they saw him pass, noticing nothing. Quickly they made a plan, and one of them, going up quietly behind him, took the halter off the mule and put it over his own head, while the other led away the mule with the load of wood. All this so softly that Sha'ah noticed nothing.

The robber with the halter over his head walked on behind Sha'ah till the other with the mule was out of sight. Then he pulled on the halter. Sha'ah, looking around, was amazed to see no mule, but a man. Then the robber, putting on a joyful voice, said.

"How can I thank you enough, my master, for setting me free from a dreadful enchantment! I was very wicked and I cursed my own mother; so that for my sins Allah caused me to be changed into a mule. But you, by your goodness and honesty, have taken away the enchantment and I am again a man. Now I am your slave. Do with me as you will."

Poor Sha'ah was dumbfounded. For a long

while he stood scratching his head. Then he spoke.

"This is really a miracle, but an inconvenient one for me. I need a mule, but what shall I do with a man? Besides, since Allah has given you back your rightful shape, he must mean to give you another chance. So go your way in peace."

The robber thanked him profusely, kissed his hands, and went away. Sha'ah went home empty-handed.

Now it happened that a few days later Sha'ah was in the market in Tunis where they sell animals, and among the beasts for sale he was surprised to see his own mule. He rubbed his eyes to be sure he had made no mistake. Then he went up to the animal and when nobody was listening he whispered reproachfully into the beast's long ear:

"Have you been cursing your mother again?"

CHAPTER III

IT was three or four months after this that Sadoc said one day to his son.

"Abdul Aziz, it will soon be Mouled. And as somehow—though I really don't see how—you have got through another year without losing any of your fingers or toes, your eyes or your nose, I suppose you will be ready to enjoy it. We must be thankful for that. Your mother will make lots of good honey cakes, and I will buy you a fine new vest for the occasion."

Abdul Aziz gave a squeal of joy over this news, for Mouled is the great day of the year for the children of Hammamet. It is to them what Christmas is to us, for it is the Mohammedan festival

of children. On that day they really seem to own the village, and their elders, who treat them rather sternly the rest of the year, look good-humoredly on all sorts of pranks.

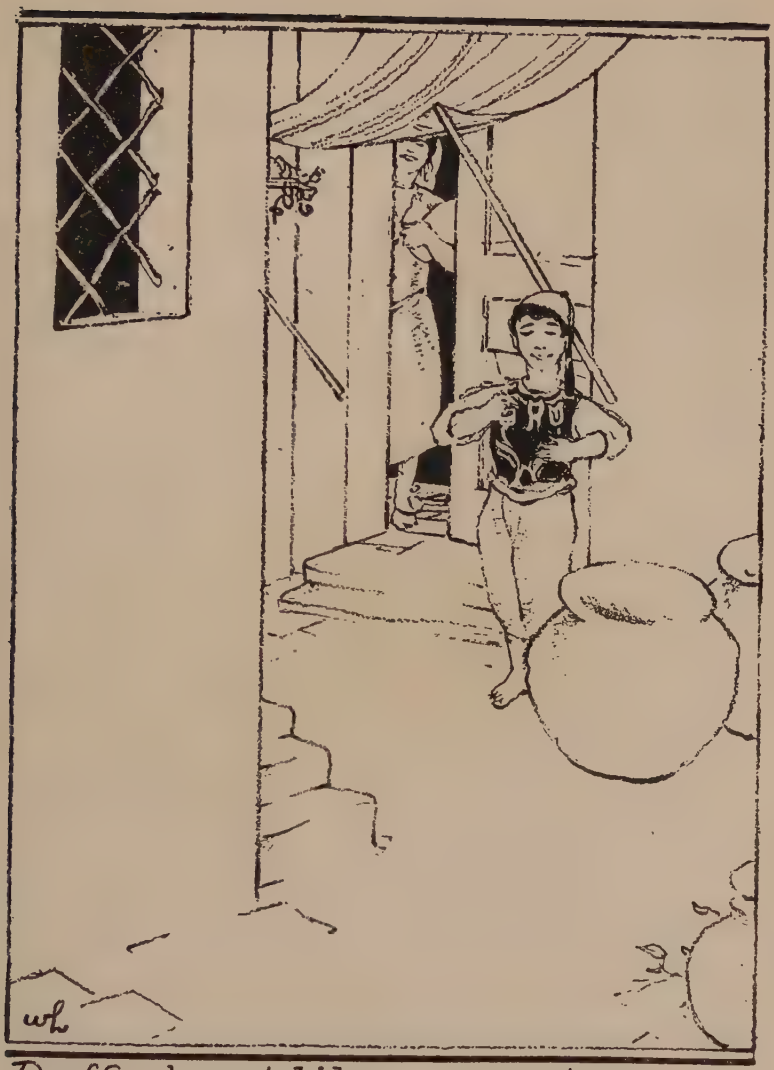
Mouled however, like Ramadan, or Lent, and the other Mohammedan festivals, has one thing about it that seems queer to us. It does not come at the same season every year. This is because the Mohammedan calendar is founded on the moon, and has eleven days less in a year than our own calendar, which goes by the sun. So the festivals move slowly around the seasons, coming eleven days earlier each year, and making the whole round in thirty-four years. The year that Sadoc spoke so, when Abdul Aziz was seven, Mouled came in the late spring, when the days were beginning to be really hot, and the gardens were drying up for the long summer.

Already it was a little warm for the fancy vest, but not for anything would the boy have left it off, least of all because he was too warm. It had no sleeves and was shaped like a man's vest, but he wore it over his other clothes, as though it had been a coat. The vest itself was made of sky-blue satin and the whole front of it was embroidered

in beautiful swirls and arabesques of silver. The effect was really handsome, and he walked in it with his chest puffed out like a pouter-pigeon and an expression of haughty indifference on his face. He did, that is, until he had spilled honey all down the front of it, and his mother had had to sponge it off. After that he walked more comfortably.

When the great day came the whole family got up very early in the morning, long before dawn, while a thin pale moon was drifting down the sky, and a small night wind was sighing over the sea. His mother packed up in a large basket many cakes made with honey, and other food, and his father stuffed his pockets full of copper pennies. Then they let themselves quietly out of the house, on to the silent white street, and went out of the village to the graveyard that lies beside the sea.

The graveyard is a stretch of yellow sand, with here and there a cactus plant, or a bit of gray sagebush. Beside it is the pebbly beach, and beyond that the sea. On the ground are small mounds of graves, each with a white-washed stone at the head of it, a plain stone bearing no name, for that



Puffed out like a pouter.sss

is forbidden. The graves lie any way at all, in no sort of order, as though they had been tossed there carelessly; and over them all the yellow sand drifts.

As Abdul Aziz and his parents came to the graveyard the first faint pink streak of dawn was just beginning to show over the sea and the pale moon was growing paler yet. Already among the graves a number of figures were moving, wrapped in white garments and looking almost ghostly in the half light.

Sadoc led the way to a particular white stone, which no one but himself could have found among the many like it. This stone marked the grave of his grandfather, and near it were other graves of the family. The three of them sat down in the sand beside the graves. Kadijah opened the basket and took from it a cloth which she placed on the grave. On this cloth she spread the food, which was in some sort an offering of thankfulness to the spirit of the dead man. Sadoc began to chant some verses from the Koran, the Bible of the Mohammedans, and Abdul Aziz and his mother joined in as best they could.

So they sat as the dawn came, and the white

light of day spread over the graveyard, where now other groups of people were sitting chanting. With the dawn too came the beggars, great numbers of poor unfortunate people in rags, each of whom asked alms in the name of Allah. To each Kadijah gave food and honey cakes, and to each Sadoc gave copper pennies. For it is decreed that at Mouled no one may go hungry.

When it was already quite light, and the last cake and the last penny had been given away, Sadoc rose to go. But before they were well started another beggar came to them. He was a small boy about Abdul Aziz' size, very thin, and dressed in dirty white rags. His eyes had about them a sort of cunning that small animals' have. And they were hungry.

"In the name of Allah, give me to eat!" he said; but instead of whining as many beggars do, he smiled, which is much harder to resist.

Sadoc and Kadijah were sorry. Kadijah held out to him the empty basket, to show that she had no more food, and Sadoc searched his pockets again, but found nothing.

"You come too late, son," he said kindly. "We have nothing left. Ask elsewhere."

Placed a cloth on the grave.

But the beggar child still smiled, and only repeated, "Give me to eat!"

Then Sadoc felt a tug at his sleeve and, looking down, saw Abdul Aziz with his face full of entreaty.

"Father," he begged in his turn, "let me take the boy home to breakfast with us! He is hungry, and it is Mouled. At home we have plenty."

Sadoc hesitated, then he said slowly. "It shall be as you ask. Hospitality is commanded of us."

So the little beggar child went home with them to a big breakfast of cous-cous and honey cakes. He ate enough to have filled two ordinary children, till the brown skin over his stomach, which they could see through his rags, was stretched as tight as polished bronze.

"He wants to make it last a long time," thought Abdul Aziz. And aloud he said, "For today you shall be my brother. Until the sun sets I will take you with me everywhere—for I have no real brother."

The beggar child smiled at him, a quick sidelong smile; and Sadoc did not deny him. So that was settled.

Later in the morning came the celebration at

the Arab school where Abdul Aziz was taught the Koran and the life of the Prophet. It was quite a grand occasion. The imam, the high priest of the mosque, was there himself, dressed in a robe so white that Abdul Aziz could hardly look at it, with a white cloth bound around his head, and a string of prayer beads. He had a white beard and a wonderful calm face. The fathers of the boys were there too, and the old women who, being no longer pretty to look at, are allowed to go where they will. Sadoc and the beggar child went with Abdul Aziz.

Near the door were candles burning, big fat candles; and as the children of the school chanted the verses and the lessons they had learned the fathers stuck franc pieces, many of them, in the soft wax around the wicks of the candles. From time to time the teacher of the school passed and took the money, which was his payment for teaching.

When Abdul Aziz' turn came to chant he piped up bravely, though his voice trembled a little. He wasn't sure he could remember properly with all those people watching him. But the words came from somewhere inside him, just

as they should; and when he had finished the imam patted him kindly on the head.

After that he and the beggar child played together, with the other boys from the village, till it was time to go visiting. The visiting was paid by the whole school of the Koran with the teacher at the head. Together they called on every family that had a child in the school, chanting verses from the Koran, showing what they had learned, and bringing good wishes for the coming year. And everywhere the families received them as the most honored of guests, giving presents to the teacher and stuffing the boys so full of honey cakes and goodies that, long before the afternoon was finished, their skins were like to burst.

When it was all over Abdul Aziz and the beggar boy started back towards home. Abdul Aziz was a little tired now, and walked in silence. Beside him the beggar child came slowly, his bare feet making no sound in the sand.

Suddenly, in an empty street, the child stopped and gave a tug at Abdul Aziz' new vest.

"Give it to me!" he said quickly, in a sort of command. "Give it to me, for I have nothing to wear but these rags."

Abdul Aziz stopped in surprise, with a small, cold skip of the heart. He looked down at the proud vest, all blue satin and silver arabesques, and he didn't know what to say.

But the beggar boy pulled harder than before.

"Today you are my brother," he said, more impellingly still, looking hard at Abdul Aziz, "and one brother should not have so much, and the other nothing. Give it to me!"

Abdul Aziz was confused. His face grew very red. Then he slowly unbuttoned the vest and held it out to the boy.

The beggar almost snatched it from his hand, hid it quickly under his rags, and then suddenly, unexpectedly, without a word of thanks, he turned and ran like a rabbit, and in a single instant the white street was empty.

For a long time Abdul Aziz stood quite still. It was late, and he was tired. And his beautiful new vest was gone forever. But most of all perhaps something inside him was hurt. Slowly the tears welled in his eyes.

But presently he winked them away and started slowly towards home. When he got there his father was not at home—for which he was glad

Franc pieces in the soft wax. ss

just then—but he heard his mother on the roof. He went up the stairs to her.

The sun was just setting over the sea, spreading a mantle of golden light over the flat white roof-tops, that stretched away in every direction, making a white world in themselves, the world of the women. For though the women may not go upon the streets except on rare occasions, the men may not go upon the roof-tops unless it is really necessary. Here the women spread the clothes to dry, here they bake the flat brown loaves of bread with caraway seed in it, and here especially they gather at sunset to breathe a while and to gossip.

Kadijah was sitting on the low coping around the roof, resting. When she heard Abdul Aziz coming she called out to him affectionately,

"How is my big son of Mouled?"

But when he came in sight her face grew serious.

"Where is your new vest?" she asked.

"Oh, Mother!" said Abdul Aziz and, since he was after all only seven, the tears came suddenly in a rush like winter rain, "Oh, Mother, I gave it away to the beggar boy. And he—he—just ran!" Then he laid his head on her knee and sobbed out the whole story.

When it was finished Kadijah gathered him into her arms. She was nearly crying too.

"Never mind, my son. Your father may be angry at first, but I can explain to him. Mother is sorry the vest is gone, but she is proud too. For generosity is one of the great virtues of my people, one of the old virtues left from the great days when the Arabs ruled the world. Do not be sorry, little Abdul Aziz. You are a true servant of Allah, who commanded that we give to the poor."

So the storm of tears subsided, and Abdul Aziz sat beside his mother in the gathering dusk on the white roof-top, that looked blue-white now. On other roof-tops were other women, and presently one of them waved across to Kadijah, for she had seen the tears. She raised her hand with a quick gesture that meant "What is it?" For the Arab women, who are prisoners, have learned as all prisoners learn to speak to one another in a sign language. So news is spread as quickly as by telegraph all across the village.

Kadijah answered with other gestures, telling the story of the beggar child and the vest. And other women were presently watching and answering, so that soon everyone knew that Abdul

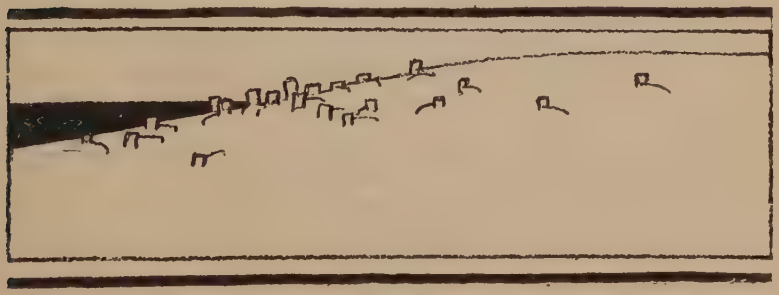
Aziz ben Sadoc had given away his new vest embroidered in silver. Some waved that he was a silly child, but some thought he had done a good deed.

Abdul Aziz of course understood all this, and he sat beside his mother and buried his face in her lap. He felt both ashamed and proud at the same time, and his heart beat so hard that it shook him as he sat. But after a while the quiet and the growing darkness soothed him, till he remembered that he was very tired.

Then, clear and warm over the darkening roofs, came the sound of the muezzin, the priest, singing from the tower of the mosque.

"La il-la il la Allah!" he sang to the east, to the south, to the west and to the north, calling the people to prayer. "La il-la il la Allah! There is but one God and Mohammed is his Prophet!"

But Abdul Aziz was asleep.



CHAPTER IV

In spite of his father's fears, however, Abdul Aziz continued to grow up; and he lost not so much as his smallest toe. Somehow the djinn, those mysterious spirits in which the Arabs believe, protected him, so that he grew strong and plump with much cous-cous.

He learned to do all the proper things. He could ride a donkey in his sleep. He sat very far back, almost on the beast's rump, and side-wise without any saddle. When he wanted the donkey to go faster he kicked both feet very fast in the air and made a loud whirring sound, "Errrrrrr—hey!" Also he had many picturesque names for the donkey, of which "Son of Satan" was the most polite.

He could play the darbouka, the pottery drum, almost as well as Amor ben Nila himself, with many strange and fascinating rhythms, so that it

throbbed and beat like an imprisoned djinni for hours together. He could recognize any woman in the village in her brown bundle by the looks of her feet and the way she walked. He could keep his father's shop for him, and never be cheated at all. Indeed he knew just who could be made to pay a cent or two more for vegetables, and just how much to put up the price if a foreigner came to buy. He could argue and bargain and sputter with the best of them over a few cents, looking as though he were about to burst with rage; and then, when the bargain was settled, he could be in an instant as calm and polite as any woman at a christening party.

He knew two dozen politeness phrases to say when someone of importance came to the house, or when he went to weddings; and he knew two hundred prickly insults to exchange with the other boys in the long battles of words they loved. He knew too how to talk French, and to beat the French boys at marbles, and how to spin a carrot on its pointed end as though it were a top. In fact he was quite an accomplished young person.

Once in a while too he used to think. Being an Arab he was never in a hurry, and time was of

no consequence to him. He did not in the least mind sitting still for an hour or two at a time, doing nothing at all but soaking in the sun, or watching the sirocco, the trade-wind, toss the olive branches about, or listening to the sleepy hum of the flies. And at these times long disconnected thoughts flowed through his brain, as water flows in a river bed.

He thought of everything under the sun, but most often perhaps he thought of what his friend the artist had said to him. The artist himself had stayed only a few months, and then gone elsewhere, but what he had told the boy of the greatness of his race remained. Other things which his father Sadoc said fitted in with the picture too. And he made fine dreams about what he would do, when he grew up, to help his people.

In the meanwhile he managed to get on in school without too many thumpings from the master's ruler, and Sadoc was proud of him, though of course he never admitted as much to the boy. When the father met one of his friends the conversation was apt to go like this.

"Good evening, Sadoc."

"Good evening, Achmed."

He could argue and bargain.

"May Allah protect you."
"May he grant you long life."
"May your goods increase."
"May your day be blessed."
"May Allah grant you health."
"May he give you salvation."
"May you lack for nothing."
"How is your son, who is a good lad?"
"Praise to Allah, he kisses your hand."

All this was just the polite way to begin a conversation—all except the words, "who is a good lad" which his friends need not say unless they wanted to. So Sadoc was pleased. Nobody ever asked how Kadijah was, for that would have been as impolite as the other was proper. The Arabs never speak to each other of their women folk if they can possibly avoid it, and if for some reason it becomes absolutely necessary they get around it as best they can, so that a man will say to another something like this.

"My house has broken its leg! Run for the doctor!"

And the other man will answer, "May Allah grant your home recovery! I will go at once."

Abdul Aziz, however, being only a boy, was al-

lowed to go into the neighbors' houses where no grown man outside the family might go without danger of being stabbed on sight. So he knew most of the women. Sometimes even, at the season of the olive crop, he worked with them. For in Hammamet it is the women and the children who harvest the olives in the orchards outside the town.

Olive picking is great fun, and the poor women, who otherwise never see the fields or the trees, look forward to it all the year. When the time comes in the late autumn there is great hurrying and scurrying, preparing of food, and packing up. For often, if the orchard is rather far away, the women sleep there for days together, without going home. It is understood at this season that the men shall not go near the orchards.

The year that Abdul Aziz was nine Sadoc came home one evening in early December and said to Kadijah.

"The olives in the far orchard, the one over towards Bir-Bou-Rekba, are ripe. On Saturday you will go with my two sisters and Chedlia my cousin, to pick them. You will take Abdul Aziz with you, and the little M'na." M'na was Ab-

dul Aziz' cousin and he was very fond of her.

Kadijah answered, as a proper Arab wife should answer, "As you command, my husband." But she smiled as she spoke, and they all knew that she was very happy.

So one morning, quite early, when the sun was just slipping, all pink and gold, out of the sea, a little caravan marched out of the village gate and up the white road. There were four brown bundles with plump bare feet, two donkeys loaded with bedding and cooking pans and food, and in the rear two excited children.

Sadoc's orchard lay well off the road in a secluded place in a sort of little valley. He had dug a well there, and put up a little one-room house of mud and stones where the women slept. The olive trees were old and gnarled and grey, and their branches sighed softly in the wind. Under them the ground was quite bare and a deep red in color—the color of the red earth from which the Lord made Adam. Nothing would grow in this dry place except the olive trees, which sent their thirsty roots far down into the earth where the water lay hidden under the hard dry surface.

After the brown bundles had unwrapped them-

selves and become women, they unloaded the donkeys and hobbled them. Then they brought out from the little house a ladder and some large squares of old canvas. The ladders were for the women. Abdul Aziz and M'na had no trouble in scrambling up without them into the grey rustling world of the olive branches, where the little leaves stirred and whispered, and the round black olives shone like bits of polished onyx. When Abdul Aziz could reach the olives he picked them by hand, and threw them down on the squares of canvas which had been spread on the ground under the trees. When the branches were too high he shook them till the fruit fell like dark hailstones, with a little pattering noise.

In the evenings, when the work was done, the women cooked wonderful sharp dishes, with lots of pimentos in them, on the pottery fire-pots; and after dinner Abdul Aziz beat his darbouka and they sang songs with queer broken rhythms and catches in them, like the catches when a singer is out of breath—only they were not out of breath. Sometimes too the women danced, the body-dance of the Arabs, holding their feet almost still and their hands in the air before them,

Sometimes the women danced.ss

and moving and twisting their bodies in a way you would not believe unless you saw it.

His mother, Kadijah, was like another person out here under the sky, in the freedom of the orchard. She laughed and sang, and she was in a good humor from morning till night. This year Abdul Aziz noticed it, and one afternoon when they were resting a little, standing looking out across the red earth, under the rustling trees, to the sea which lay like a deep blue carpet in the distance, he asked her about it.

At first his mother would not answer, saying only;

"Your father does not like me to talk of it."

But Abdul Aziz begged, and presently she told him.

"I was not born in the village, like the other women here. I am a Bedouine, and I was born in a tent, far away on the great desert to the south. The Bedouins my people live a free roving life, under the stars, and under the hot sun of the desert. I was free too. My face was not veiled. I was free to come and go as I liked in the hills and the wide air.

"Then came a great drought in the south. For

three years not a drop of rain fell, and everything dried up. The desert wells were dry. There was no pasture for our animals. So we came north, searching for food. One day we camped in the fields outside Hammamet, and there we gave a fantasia, a festival in honor of a marriage in the tribe. Many people from the village came, among them your father. He saw me and spoke to me—I have told you that I was free then—and from that moment he loved me. And I loved him." Her voice grew gentle as the breeze in the olive leaves. "I loved him too."

"So we were married and I came to live in the village. Your father shut me up as the village women are shut up. I am no longer free, but I am content. I would not leave him even for the stars and the desert. But sometimes I smother a little in the house. So you can see, my little son, why I love the olive picking, and why I am gay, here under the sky."

After this Abdul Aziz had something new to think of when he lay on his back in the sun. But he never spoke to his father about it.

When the olives had all been gathered Sadoc came with his brother, bringing more donkeys,

each with two baskets hanging panier-fashion on its flanks. In these the olives were loaded and carried to the mill to be pressed. So the little caravan of women, now turned again into brown bundles, set out once more for the village, with the children and the loaded donkeys. But they were not so gay as when they went.

After the olives had been pressed, the oil was stored in big pottery jars, called gargouillets. They were red-brown in color, with handles at each side of the top, and they were just such jars as those in which the forty thieves were hidden, in the old story of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves"; for in many ways the lives of the Arabs have not changed since the days of the "Arabian Nights." Only Sadoc's jars were a little smaller. These gargouillets he put in a small room, a sort of storehouse, next door to his house, to keep till such time as he should be able to go to the city of Tunis to sell them at the oil market. For the harvest from his olive orchard was the chief source of Sadoc's income.

This storehouse was not connected with the house itself, but was a separate building, with a door of its own which gave on to the street. This

door was always kept locked with a strong padlock, for fear of thieves. And, lest even so someone might break in, Sadoc kept a watch-dog on the flat roof of the storehouse, which was lower than the roofs beside it. The dog could get neither up nor down, so that it lived always on the roof. Sadoc had built it a rough kennel there, and he or Abdul Aziz used every day to take food to it. It was a very savage dog, lean and bad-tempered as Arab dogs usually are, and its chief amusement was to bark at the people who passed; but since it could not get down to hurt them, nobody minded.

Abdul Aziz' bed was below a window which looked out over the roof of the storehouse, and when he looked out on moonlit nights he could see the dog moving restlessly about, or hear it howling to the moon. Sometimes he felt sorry for it.

One night, while the oil was stored next door, Abdul Aziz waked up suddenly, hearing the dog growl in its throat. It was not a loud growl, but it sounded surprised. Abdul Aziz looked out, but the night was dark and there were no street lights

in the village. He could see nothing. But he listened intently.

Suddenly he heard a sound like that made by a body falling, a sort of plumping sound, in the sand of the street. He waited for the dog to bark, but the animal made no sound. Instead, he thought he heard the sound of a blow, followed by whispered voices and a faint scraping sound.

Sure now that something was wrong the boy sprang to his father's bed, for Sadoc was still sleeping soundly, and called him.

"Father, father, wake up!" he cried. "Someone is trying to steal the oil!"

Sadoc leaped to his feet, seized a heavy stick, and made for the door of the house with the boy at his heels. He opened it cautiously and peered out. He could see little, but the sound he made had frightened the robbers, and he heard them running off up the street. Sadoc ran after them, calling out sputtering curses, for he was furiously angry. In the distance the boy heard the sound of wheels and knew that the robbers were making off in the cart they had brought to carry away the oil.

Abdul Aziz, whose eyes were growing accustomed to the dark, saw presently a limp object lying beside the storehouse wall. He bent over it, and saw that it was the unfortunate dog, quite dead. The robbers had tied a big fish-hook to a stout cord, baited it with a piece of meat, and thrown it up on the roof. The dog had snapped at it and, his mouth stopped with the meat, the robbers had pulled him down from the roof with a sudden jerk of the cord. Before he could get free, or even make a sound, they had killed him with a blow. So quickly had they been frightened off that the cord and the meat were still in his mouth.

After a while Sadoc came back.

"They got away," he said, "but I think I know who they are, and I shall bring them to justice."

Then, very quietly, he took out ten francs and gave them to Abdul Aziz. It was more money than the boy had ever had of his own in his life before, and he looked at it in a daze as he heard his father saying solemnly.

"Abdul Aziz, by your quick-wittedness you have saved me five thousand francs. Take this, and spend it as you like. You are a son of whom I am proud."

CHAPTER V

BDUL AZIZ, growing longer in the shank and stronger in the back, was growing at the same time sharper in the wits. All sorts of things turned and twisted in his brain; things kind and things unkind, things good, bad and indifferent, spun round in his head like sparks from a pin-wheel. And it must be admitted that most of the things he thought of, he did.

There was, for instance, the strange adventure that befell the camel on the roof of the hammam bath. The village was both amused and mystified by it, but not till months afterward did they find out who was the cause of it.

This camel was a poor, undernourished beast, whose unfortunate lot it was to walk round and round in a circle all his days, with blindfold eyes, drawing water for the public bath. He was harnessed to a bar that turned on the roof and, turning, pulled up the water by means of buckets

and dumped it into a tank. The circle he made was so small that the beast walked always a little sideways, and all the hair was worn off his side where the harness rubbed. His temper was very bad—for which no one could blame him—and he grunted and bubbled incessantly as he turned.

There was no hope for the future for him either, for the keeper of the bath, a cross, overbearing man, had taken him up to the roof years before, when he was small enough to pass up the narrow stairs. Now he was too big to get down again. His shelter was on the roof also, and only when he died would his body be thrown down.

Nevertheless one morning the bath-keeper, going to work, was astounded to see his camel, loose and without a blindfold, capering in an ecstasy of freedom in the sand outside the village. He rolled luxuriously, rubbing his chafed back, and he breakfasted royally on juicy cactus leaves, prickly with spines.

The bath-keeper was furious, but there was no way to get him up again. So the water for the hammam was thereafter drawn by a donkey which, being small enough to get up and down stairs, had an easier lot.

Nobody thought to ask Abdul Aziz how it happened; yet he could have told a tale of a tackle borrowed from the Italian house-builder and of a band of cronies who labored in the night lowering a struggling camel, and all but getting themselves pulled off in the process.

That same spring Abdul Aziz' uncle, one of Sadoc's younger brothers, was married. Now a wedding, wherever it takes place, is an exciting thing; but in Hammamet a wedding is practically the only excitement there is. The village has no theatre of any kind, no circus, no moving pictures, no dances, no games like base-ball—nothing but marriages. So the weddings have something of all these things in them.

Five days and five nights a wedding lasts, particularly five nights. During the day there are all sorts of ceremonies, some at the home of the groom, and some at the home of the bride. For the poor bride and groom have never seen one another, and the last thing the bridegroom does, after the five days are all over, is to lift the veil of his bride and see what she looks like!

But first the little lady is bathed and perfumed, her hair is washed every day with henna and her

feet and hands are painted with kohl. A queer pattern is also painted on her face. Then she is dressed in gorgeous robes of stiff embroidery, so stiff that she can hardly move in them, a veil of the same stiff gold is put over her face, she is bundled, on top of this, in a huge white blanket without even a peep-hole, and taken through the streets with drum-beating and applauding to the house of her future husband. These things, and others, take up the five days.

At night the excitement is at the house of the bridegroom. About eleven o'clock, in the stillness of the warm nights, the drums begin to throb, and the throbbing goes on all through the night. The sound rises and falls across the white roofs, in the blue moonlight, and is blown on the wind to the farthest house in the village. When they hear it the people begin to gather for the merry-making.

The men sit in the courtyard, which is lit by yellow lantern light, on benches around the edge and on the ground, leaving a space in the center. The women, in their white and brown bundles, sit on the roof and look down. In the center of the courtyard the musicians beat their small pot-

tery darboukas, or their great two-headed drums, and play the shrill Arab flute. In the center too the dancers dance and sing, leaping and turning, and chanting wild and strange songs that echo under the moon. From time to time coffee is served, and rose-water, and queer foods. It is all very delightful.

It is also very expensive—for the groom. So the people have found a system for making it easier to manage. The guests are all expected to give money. From time to time the dancing stops and a man known as the caller comes forward. He goes to the guests one at a time and they give him money, sometimes only a franc or two, sometimes a bill for five francs or twenty, or more if they are rich. Then the caller holds the money above his head so that everyone can see it, and he calls out a queer rigmarole, asking a blessing on the giver and all his family and his friends. After that the women on the roof give a high piercing sound of applause. "La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la!" they cry, nearly splitting their throats.

One night at his uncle's wedding a sudden spark was lit in Abdul Aziz' brain—and at once he acted on it. There was in the village a certain

rich man named Achmed who was quite miserly, and never gave as much as he should give at weddings. That night he was sitting comfortably in a corner when the caller came towards him, intending to ask for money. Achmed saw him coming, and grudgingly took out his pocket-book, intending to give only a franc or two.

But before the caller quite got there Abdul Aziz, who was purposely standing beside Achmed, said to him, looking as innocent as a young lamb.

"What a pretty embroidered pocket-book you have! Let me look at it!"

The miser suspected nothing, and was flattered. He held out the pocket-book which was made of red Morocco leather embroidered in gay colors, and Abdul Aziz looked at it admiringly, all the time keeping his eye on the caller. Then, just as the caller came up and held out his hand, the boy quickly seized a bill for a hundred francs from the pocket-book and gave it to the caller.

"A hundred francs from Achmed!" he cried as loud as he could.

The caller looked surprised, but he took the money and held it up, giving an especially elaborate blessing, and all the women on the roof, see-

A hundred francs from Achmed!ss

ing the miser give so much, burst into wild applause.

Achmed was very angry, but he was ashamed to take the money back, so he had to pretend to smile and be happy. And Abdul Aziz got an extra dish of honey cakes from his uncle.

But all the things the boy did were not so harmless as these. He got several sound thrashings from his father for his pranks, and once at least he got himself into serious trouble. It was one summer afternoon when Sadoc had sent him on an errand outside of the village, to deliver a bundle to the strange Frenchman who wore Arab clothes and had become a Mohammedan.

The boy went by the hard road, but coming back, for no reason at all, he turned into the wed. Now the word "wed" means really a river or stream, but it is not like any river we have at home. It is just a dry sandy bed, bordered by cactus bushes. Underfoot the dust is marked with many footprints of animals. Once in a very long while—and always in winter—a great rain comes, such a rain that it seems the clouds have burst like torn water-skins. The water falls in a solid grey sheet then, and the dry wed comes suddenly to

life in a muddy torrent that fills the bed to overflowing and sometimes tears away great pieces of the bank. But the water flows only a few hours. By the next day, when the sun shines again, the wed is dry as before, ready to serve once more as a road for the cattle going to and from their pasture ground.

Abdul Aziz trudged along in the dry bed feeling somewhat out of sorts. It was a hot breathless sort of afternoon and he went slowly, trailing his bare toes in the dust, and stopping now and then to throw a stone at a blackbird.

Suddenly, coming round a bend, he came on a man sitting on a big stone. The man had a discontented, shifty face and his clothes were torn and dirty. He was smoking a cigarette and muttering to himself. Abdul Aziz knew very well who he was; he was Maharez the worthless fisherman, whom the boy's father, Sadoc, had forbidden him to go about with. So Abdul Aziz started to trudge past him.

But when he saw the boy he smiled ingratiatingly and called out.

"Hullo, Abdul Aziz. May Allah grant you health!"

"May he increase your goods," answered the boy, and trudged on.

But Maharez called again, "Come and sit down a while. It's too hot to be so energetic. One would think you were a Roumi!"

The boy hesitated. He knew Sadoc would not like him to sit down; but it really was hot. And besides Maharez offered him a cigarette, and he liked cigarettes, though he would never dare smoke in the presence of his father. He sat down.

Maharez didn't say or do anything alarming, just sat beside him smoking lazily and now and then chatting about nothing, in the way people will do in the heat. Abdul Aziz found himself wondering just what Sadoc didn't like about Maharez. He seemed pleasant enough.

So a half hour passed idly; and finally the boy rose to go. Maharez rose also and strolled along beside him, which made Abdul Aziz slightly uncomfortable, for if Maharez went clear to the village with him Sadoc would be sure to hear of it. Still, there seemed no way of preventing him.

Presently they came to the place where the wed led down to the sandy beach, and the sea. From here the boy's way led along the beach to the vil-

lage. But here at the entrance to the wed Maharez' fishing boat was lying, partly drawn up on the sand. He stopped beside it and yawned.

"Well," said Maharez, "it is getting time for me to bring in my nets. I must be going." Then he turned to Abdul Aziz and said easily, "Won't you come along?"

"Oh, no!" answered the boy. "Father wouldn't let me."

But Maharez insisted. "The nets are really too heavy for one person to manage," he said, "and the man who goes with me isn't here today. If you come I'll give you his portion of the fish. Besides, if you haven't been, it's fun."

The boy hesitated again, longer this time. The weather was growing more and more breathless, and he thought it would be cooler on the sea. The fish might be worth a good many francs, and he could always use money. Also he really would like to go. He looked up and down the beach, but saw no one. So he nodded slowly.

Together they pushed the boat off and scrambled in. Maharez set the single sail and the boat began slowly, very slowly, for there was hardly a breath of air, to pull away from the shore.

It was pleasant, sitting here on the water, which was as smooth as molten metal, pleasant and lazy. Abdul Aziz enjoyed himself. He had too that sense of excitement deep inside him with which poor mankind begins something he knows he should not do. He lay along the seat in the middle of the boat on his stomach, while Maharez sat in the back and held the tiller.

Presently the air, which had seemed dead, came suddenly to life. A cool breath passed over the sea with a deep sigh, and a breeze sprang up. The boat began to move smartly through the water.

From under the seat Maharez produced a jug. He passed it to Abdul Aziz.

"Want a drink?" he asked.

Abdul Aziz took it, but when he saw that the jug contained strong red wine he passed it back hastily.

"Oh, no!" he said. "No, I mustn't."

The Koran is very strict in forbidding the faithful to drink wine, and Abdul Aziz, according to his lights, was a good Mohammedan. It was one thing to disobey his father's wishes, but quite another to disobey the Koran.

Maharez shrugged his shoulders and took a long drink himself.

The pleasant sense of excitement inside the boy began to change to a vague feeling of apprehension. The breeze, once begun, was stiffening rapidly, and the boat was already far away from the village, spinning merrily through the water, which was now grey and ruffled. Maharez continued to drink from the jug.

"Where are the nets?" asked Abdul Aziz.

"Over there!" and Maharez waved his hand to the southward, towards the far arm of the big bay on which they were sailing.

He seemed to be in a rare good humor. Indeed, as the sense of alarm deepened in the boy, Maharez on the contrary grew more and more elated. He sang and told stories; and more and more often he drank.

It was now getting towards dusk and a real sea was running. A summer storm was rising rapidly, as they do in southern waters. The little boat was rocking and rolling uncomfortably, and the wind was beginning to whistle overhead. Abdul Aziz was frightened.

"Maharez!" he called—it was necessary to call

now—"Maharez! A storm is coming up. Let us go back. I am afraid."

But Maharez only leered comfortably. With the pitching of the boat he slipped down into the bottom, still holding the tiller rope in his hand.

" 'Sall right! Don't worry. I'm here," he said thickly. He sang another snatch of song. Then, to Abdul Aziz' horror, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI

ABDUL AZIZ was terrified.

Every minute the waves grew bigger, and the wind howled more loudly. The sky was full of dark ragged clouds, but he knew no rain would fall, because no rain ever falls in summer in that country. He was getting wet, however, from the salt spray that blew past.

The body of Maharez slipped and rolled in the bottom of the boat. His face, usually so discontented, wore now a sort of fatuous leer. Abdul Aziz bent over him in the swaying boat and shook him.

"Maharez! Maharez! Wake up!" he called, and shook with all his might. But Maharez did not wake.

The boy looked out across the darkening sea. The boat was scudding southward ahead of the storm. Already they were many miles away from Hammamet, and about half a mile out to sea.

What should he do? There was no longer any question of bringing in the nets, even if he knew where they were. Neither could he hope to get back to the village. The most he could hope for would be to get ashore somewhere.

But how? He knew nothing at all about a sail-boat, and even if he had known what to do, he could not have done it alone. It takes two men to handle a fishing smack in a high sea. If they kept on in the course the boat was taking they would be swept past the arm of the bay into the open sea, and that he knew would mean sure death.

The boy was holding the tiller now, and he tried to turn the boat in towards the low-lying shore. But, as her nose swung around, the sail swung too, the canvas flapping and lashing with a sound like cannon shot. The boat rocked horribly and a great wave came overboard, soaking him to the skin, and partly filling the hull, so that the body of the sleeping fisherman rolled in the water. Quickly, in mortal terror, the boy turned the tiller back again, and, after a breathless moment, the boat took up her scudding course once more. That way, at least, was the wrong way to mend matters.

But the sudden cold bath had penetrated even through the stupor that held Maharez. He lurched heavily to his feet, holding by the mast, and looked about him. Slowly reason came back to his sodden brain; and with reason came fear. He called out sharply to Abdul Aziz.

"Put her about! We must take in sail!"

The boy, in a rush of thankfulness that someone knew what to do, tried to obey, but without really understanding. He put the tiller over again, but less sharply than before. Again came the slashing and whipping of the canvas, and the lurching of the boat. Maharez, standing in the bottom, loosened a rope and grabbed at the flapping canvas.

But it was too late. Suddenly, with a great cracking sound, the mast broke, and mast and sail together went flapping overboard like some huge ill-omened bird.

With them went Maharez.

It was almost dark now, but Abdul Aziz, frozen with terror, saw him strike the water, and an instant later his face, looking very white in the dusk, drifted quickly past—and was gone.

A sort of numbness came over the boy, that

was partly an extremity of terror, and partly the fatalistic acceptance of death which is so strong in his race.

"Mektoub! What is to be, is written," he thought. "I shall drown here."

Nonetheless he found an old fish-basket and began to bail out the water. It was all he could do now in the helpless battered hull. But it was small use; the water gained on him steadily. The boat could not keep afloat much longer.

Then, dimly through the darkness, he saw ahead of him the white line of the breakers and heard the louder booming of the surf. The boat was being driven on the shore.

"Now!" thought Abdul Aziz.

Instinctively he stood up in the stern as a great comber struck with a shock that seemed to split the world, and buried him and the boat in a boundless smothering mass of liquid darkness.

What happened next he never knew. But after an eternity of drifting in the void he became conscious for an instant that he was lying on his face in the water, and that there was ground under him. With the last ounce of his strength he dragged himself a few feet upward on the

yielding sand. Then blackness came over him and he lay still.

It must have been some time later that he came to himself, with a shudder of nausea. He was still lying on the beach, indeed his feet were still in the water. But the storm was subsiding almost as quickly as it had arisen, and above him in the heavens shone a small newly-minted moon.

Slowly, with infinite difficulty, he dragged himself up the beach. He was sore and he was sick. Every muscle in his body ached; his hair, his ears, even his mouth was full of sand and salt. But he was alive.

Presently he was able to look about him. The boat had grounded on a lonely and deserted stretch of shore, just at the very end of the arm of the bay. The sandy infertile soil stretched away in the dim light without a dwelling or even a field. But finally he made out, at some distance, a low dark shape that might be a building. He got upon his feet and staggered towards it. It proved to be a sort of hut, hardly more than a shelter, of mud and stones, which the fishermen had built for just such an emergency. There was no one in

it, but there he found a litter of dry grass and sticks, and groping further a box of matches.

With these he made himself a fire, over which he crouched till a comfortable warmth stole over him and his wet clothes steamed mustily. Then a terrible weariness overcame him and he lay down on the sand and slept.

When he waked the sun was already high in the heavens, and his strength had returned, though he was still stiff and sore. He looked along the bay and, far in the distance, he could just make out in the warm sunlight the old Saracen fort that juts into the sea at Hammamet. A prayer of thankfulness rose in him, and he knelt in the sand as the Arabs kneel, bowing himself three times to the ground, and giving thanks to Allah.

Then he set off, as best he might, to walk home.

But he was weak and hungry, and it was slow work. Several times he lay down to rest. Once, about noon, he came on an old man who gave him a piece of bread and an onion. After that it was easier and at last, when it was already dusk, he trudged into the village.

As he came near his house he saw that the door was open, and from within came a high rhythmic

wailing in women's voices. Outside the door, with his back against the wall of the house opposite, a man sat. In spite of the warmth of the evening he was wrapped, even his face, in a bournous. He was weeping aloud in great sobs that shook his whole body.

Abdul Aziz' heart sank in him. The man did not look up and the boy dared not speak to him, but went quickly in the open doorway. Within he saw a sight which he had seen before, but which always shook him with a strange dread.

The women, a dozen of them, were wailing for one dead. They stood in a circle, facing inward, in the flickering light of torches. Their hair hung loose over their shoulders and with their finger nails they had torn great gashes in their unveiled faces, gashes from which the blood streamed. They were bending rhythmically backward and forward from the waist, stamping with one foot and clawing at their faces. And as they swayed they wailed, a high piercing wail that came in a triple wave of sound, rising and falling eerily, terribly.

Foremost among them was his mother Kadijah. Her face was more torn than the others, so that

Made himself a fire. ssssssss

Abdul Aziz could hardly bear to look at her. Now and then the wailing ceased for a moment and her voice took up a sort of chant, a ritual in praise of the dead.

"He was so good; he was so sweet!" she cried, rocking and stamping. And the women answered with their triple wail.

It was horrible. Abdul Aziz stood frozen in the doorway. Who could have died while he was gone? For whom were they wailing? Then suddenly he understood. It was for him, for Abdul Aziz. They thought he was dead!

With a quick, half strangled cry, he sprang forward into the courtyard and flung himself into his mother's arms.

"Mother, mother!" he cried, "See! I have come home!" and he buried his face in her breast.

Instantly all the wailing stopped. Kadijah dropped on her knees beside him and held him off at arms' length to be quite sure she was not dreaming. Then she gathered him to her breast again and burst into great sobs of relief, almost as hard to bear as the wailing.

"I thought you were dead!" she sobbed over and over again. "Someone saw you get into

Maharez' boat, and when his body was found this morning we were sure you were drowned. Oh, my son, my son!"

So Abdul Aziz came home to stop his own wake.

But it was none too pleasant an occasion even then. For, after the first relief was over, his parents began to grow angry at the disobedience which had got him into trouble in the first place. And all the aunts and the neighbors' wives, who had wailed and scratched their faces for nothing, were angry too, and went muttering home to wash away as much of the damage as they could.

His father too, when he had heard the whole story, added a sound thrashing to the boy's other troubles. So it was a very sad and sorry boy who cried himself to sleep that night. But just before he dropped off he felt warm arms around him and his mother's kisses on his wet cheek, and he slept, comforted.

It seemed, however, that death, having once come so near the little family, was not to be balked of his prey.

Before long his father Sadoc sickened with one of the tropical maladies that come in the hot sea-

son. They did what they could; they tried the powdered charms and incantations, the anointings and the bleedings, of the Arab doctors. They even called the French doctor from Nabeul. But it was all of no avail. Sadoc sank rapidly, and in a few days they knew that he must die.

When his last hour came the women gathered about his bed-side, silent, or sobbing softly. Abdul Aziz was there too, his eyes large with terror. Then the dying man, with his last strength, lifted his right hand, with one finger raised, in the final confession of his faith, "There is but one God, Allah!"

The women burst again into their terrible wailing—and Sadoc was dead.

So Abdul Aziz was left alone with his mother to face a new and different life.

CHAPTER VII

LATE one afternoon a few weeks after his father's death Abdul Aziz came home to find his mother busy in a strange way. She had spread all the clothes and trinkets and small objects in the house over the floor and was carefully picking out this thing and that thing and packing them up in bundles. When she saw her son she made him sit down beside her on the bed and said solemnly.

"Abdul Aziz, you and I are going away from Hammamet and, if Allah wills it, I think we shall never come back."

The boy's breath nearly stopped with surprise, but all he could do was to stammer out, "Why?"

"I am going back to my own people," answered his mother simply.

Her own people! The boy remembered then, what he had almost forgotten, that his mother was a Bedouine, and all she had told him of the free life of the desert. His thoughts raced so fast that he couldn't say anything at all.

"I was happy here in Hammamet while your father was alive," she went on quietly. "When a woman loves, her home is not a prison. But now that he is dead my heart is a caged hawk that yearns for freedom." She paused an instant and then went on more quickly. "Today, on the way to your grandfather's, I met a Bedouin whom I used to know in the years long gone. I spoke to him, and he told me that my father's tents are pitched now a mile to the northeast of the sacred city of Kairouan, far in the southward. If we go at once we can find him, and he will take us in. We shall live the old wandering life again, free on the desert under the stars. You shall ride and romp to your heart's content, and O Abdul Aziz, we shall be happy again!"

The boy's head was in a whirl, but it was a warm and pleasant whirl. Suddenly the village,

which had always been the world to him, seemed very small and narrow, like a closed room on which his mother had opened a door. Yet one thing troubled him.

"But—but will my father's father let us go?" he asked anxiously.

Kadijah's face clouded. "If he knew you were going he would forbid it," she admitted. "He could no longer forbid me, now that I am a widow, but he could forbid you, and keep you to grow up here in the village. But I would not go without you. Where the mare goes, there should the colt follow. You would rather come with me to the great desert than stay here with your grandfather, wouldn't you?" And she looked anxiously into his face.

The boy smiled up at her and his cheeks were very red.

"I will come with you," he answered quietly.

"Allah be praised!" cried his mother. "Then we must get ready at once. We must take the iron caravan at five o'clock tomorrow morning, before anyone is stirring. When they find we are gone we shall be far away. But first you, who have been to school and can write"—she said this proudly,

for women and even many men do not write in Hammamet—"must sit down and write a letter to your grandfather, so that he will not think an accident has befallen us. Tell him simply that we have gone to my people, but not where they are. Then they will not find us."

So Abdul Aziz wrote a funny little ink-stained note—for after all he couldn't write very well yet —which they left in the house to be found when someone should come to look for them. Afterwards they ate, and then the boy slept a little, dreaming excited dreams of the desert of which he had heard so much. But all night long Kadijah was busy packing and setting the house to rights.

Long before dawn she wakened him, and they stole out together, carrying everything they would need with them in bundles. They walked the mile to the station by the light of a waning moon, like the half of a silver penny in the sky. The shadows of the trees were very black beside the road, and the few dim figures, going like themselves towards the station, seemed almost eerie in the silence. Abdul Aziz felt as though he were walking in a dream.

It was dawn when the French train, the "iron

caravan," came in, puffing and wheezing. As trains go, it was a very small train, hardly bigger than a street-car, but Abdul Aziz thought it huge and not a little terrifying. The two went timidly into a third-class coach and settled themselves in a corner. Presently with a grunt the train started and the boy, who had never in his life ridden on anything faster than a trotting donkey, saw with amazement and a little tightening of his heart how fast the olive orchards and the fields of home sped in the opposite direction. He looked at the brown bundle across from him in the seat, the only familiar thing in the world, and saw his mother's one black eye smiling at him through the peep-hole. He had a queer feeling inside him and his heart was beating very fast, but he leaned forward and spoke quietly.

"Tell me again the name of my grandfather and his tribe," he said.

"They are called the Ouled ben Idress, and long ago they came from far away Morocco," answered the muffled voice under all that cloth. "Their tents are pitched now a mile to the northeast of Kairouan, to which the iron caravan will

They stole out together. ssssss

take us. Your grandfather is called Maroc, and he is a famous sorcerer."

Then she added, "But do not talk now, my son. It is not fitting that I speak before all these strange men in the coach."

So through the hours the boy sat silent, watching the French railway stations and the level fields as they sped past. It was August now, and the fields lay parched and dried in a hard crust; for in Tunisia the winter is the growing season.

Before noon they passed the French city of Sousse, and from here the road turned inland and they sped and jounced through a great desert plain, where as far as the eye could see there was no tree and no sign of a human dwelling, only the blazing sun and the flat sand, tied down with clumps of sage-brush. Abdul Aziz' eyes were shining as he looked out across the waste that was to be his new home.

Then with a whistle and a jolt the train drew into the station at Kairouan. They had arrived at last. Kadijah and the boy gathered up their belongings and got down, amid the hustling, shouting stream of Arabs, French people, travel-

lers and porters. But Kadijah did not leave the station at once. Instead she led the way to the women's waiting room, and, leaving the boy outside, she went in.

Abdul Aziz sat on a bundle. Again his heart was beating fast and he was filled with wonder at all these strange people who were all so busy. Kadijah lingered, but after a while he heard a familiar voice and looked up. He couldn't see the brown bundle that was his mother anywhere.

Beside him stood a Bedouine, dressed in a short blue garment held together only by great silver pins on the shoulders and a narrow belt. Her arms and legs and even one side, from the arm-pit to the waist, were bare, and her head was wrapped in a big red scarf like a turban. Her face was as bare as any man's. And she laughed.

With a great start Abdul Aziz realized that this strange person was Kadijah, Kadijah whose face in all the years he had known her had never been seen by any man but her husband and her husband's family, and who in the village would have died of shame rather than be seen thus by every passing man.

But now she smiled down at him with shining eyes. "Don't you know me, little son?"

Abdul Aziz was filled with a great surprise and a little dismay. "But—but you seem so strange!" he stammered.

"Yet before I married your father I was always dressed this way," she answered. "Now I shall never wear the veil again. From today I am free. You shall see, little Abdul Aziz, that it is better to be free. Come now!" And she gathered up the bundles and started off down the platform.

The boy followed her silently, his thoughts in a daze. Since even his mother was so changed, walking unveiled and fearlessly, with great steps like a man's, in the street beside him, what strange things might not happen to him!

They passed through the French streets near the platform, across an open square and through the gate of the Arab city. Here they came into the principal street of the town, wide and bustling, lined with shops and Arab cafés. Abdul Aziz' head kept turning as though it were on a pivot, trying to see everything at once. After a bit the street grew narrower and more crowded.

Merchants and people buying, peddlers crying their wares, soldiers, donkeys, beggars and children, with here and there a tall lithe Bedouin from the desert, crowded and bustled. Beautiful carpets and bright colored bags and shoes of embroidered leather hung in the shops. The throbbing of drums and the sound of singing came from the cafés. It was all very strange and puzzling.

Presently, in a sort of little eddy of the street, the boy saw a crowd watching intently something on the pavement. Just for a moment he forgot where he was and, diving between the legs of the bystanders, he wormed his way in to see what it could be. There in a circle of crowding faces stood a snake-charmer, a fat man in a turban and a sort of skirt who whirled and danced, playing as he did so on a shrill flute. On the ground before him lay a basket from which two hooded serpents were slowly crawling. They raised themselves on their tails and their heads swayed from side to side. As the man danced they seemed to dance too, moving so that they always faced him. Now and then they hissed softly. Once one of them dropped its head and started to crawl away into the crowd, but the man seized it by the tail and

swung it back. Then, very quickly, he grasped each one behind the head and thrust it back into the basket. The show was finished and the man began to collect copper sous from the bystanders.

Suddenly, with a start of terror, Abdul Aziz realized that his mother was no longer beside him. In a quick panic he darted hither and thither in the crowd, looking for the mother he had always known, the brown bundle. But nowhere could he find her. Then he remembered, with a fresh sinking of the heart, that she was no longer a bundle but a slender Bedouine in blue, and he knew that in his terror he might have passed her without recognizing her. He caught his breath sharply and heard it come in a sort of sob.

Then he saw, some way ahead of him, a blue figure that whisked into a side street. He followed as fast as he could, hoping suddenly. But the narrow brown street, hardly wider than his two arms could span, led into a maze of little passageways that turned and twisted every which way. Many of the passages had no outlet at all. And in none of them could he find the blue figure. In spite of himself he burst into tears as he wandered miserably along.

After what seemed a long time he found himself on the main street again, in front of a café with wooden benches covered with matting, on which men were sitting idly. The boy dropped down on one of them, fighting back the tears, but not succeeding very well. For all his ten years he felt very small and very, very lost.

Then a voice spoke in his ear.

"May Allah protect you," it said.

"May he grant you long life," answered the boy politely, gulping down a mouthful of tears. He looked up and saw, sitting on the bench beside him, a young Bedouin who looked at him curiously.

"What is troubling you?" asked the man.

"I—I'm as lost as a carrot in a basket of dates," answered Abdul Aziz. "My household"—for even in his distress he remembered his manners—"is turned into a Bedouine and gone, and I cannot find my grandfather." Then he poured out the whole story.

"By Sidi Sahab, we are well met, for I can help you," said the man. "I know where the tents of your grandfather are pitched." He looked sharply at the boy. "Have you any money?" he asked.

Abdul Aziz had, a little.

"Then for a franc"—which is about four cents in our money—"I will set you on your way."

"It is settled!" said the boy, and he struck his hands together in the way the Arabs do to settle a bargain. "If I can get to the Ouled ben Idress, so can my household."

So he and his guide set out through the maze of narrow streets, which didn't puzzle the man at all, towards the east gate of the town. When they had passed under its arch the narrow streets and the bustle of the town ceased abruptly. They stepped suddenly into a wide peace. Before him the boy saw a tree or two, and at some distance three wells. But that was all. The rest, as far as the eye could reach, was just the great desert plain that stretched, flat and lonely, to the far horizon.

His guide stopped and pointed away over the plain. "There lies your way," he said. "Go straight ahead, with the town behind you, and keep your eyes open. Before sundown you will see the tents of Si Maroc. May Allah protect you." He turned on his heel and was gone.

Abdul Aziz felt suddenly lonely again. The sun was already far down the western sky, so that

the shadow of the city wall stretched out long before him, and the plain looked very big and empty. But he told himself bravely that he was a man and at least half a Bedouin, and that fear was not for him. He took a new grip on the bundle he carried and started off, very small in that great space, to find the tents of the grandfather he had never seen.

When he had walked a while across the trackless waste, which now that he was on it seemed half dust and half sand, he looked back at the city of Kairouan. It gleamed against the evening sky, crowned with the domes and minarets of the mosques, like a city in a dream. About its feet were many graveyards, for the Mohammedans count it a sacred city and believe that anyone who dies within its walls will go straight to Paradise. So many people come here to die. But Abdul Aziz set his face to the eastward and trudged on.

When the short twilight was already falling, and he was beginning to be afraid that he might pass the tents in the darkness, he saw off to the left a group of low shapes that looked in the great space so small that he had to look twice to be sure they were really there. In the dusk they might

A tall gaunt figure. sssssssss

have been shadows. But he knew them for the tents and with a rush of relief he hurried towards them.

Then he saw coming towards him in the failing light a tall gaunt figure in white robes which presently, seeing the boy, stopped and waited for him. As Abdul Aziz came closer he saw that the man was an old Bedouin with a high stern face like a hawk and piercing eyes that seemed always to see further than the thing they were looking at. He was rather terrifying there in the darkening plain and the boy's heart skipped a beat. But he went forward bravely and spoke respectfully.

"May Allah give you peace," he said, and waited.

"May he reward you," answered a deep but not unkindly voice, in spite of its stern ring. There was an instant's silence and then Abdul Aziz thought his ears had betrayed him, for the voice continued in the same level tone.

"You are the son of Kadijah, and I am Maroc your grandfather."

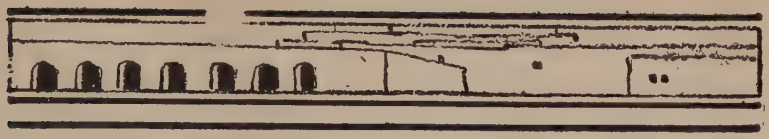
In a rush of thankfulness the boy went forward and kissed the robe of the old man in token of

respect. He should have kissed him on the shoulder, but he was not tall enough for that. Then he stammered.

"But—but how did you know it was I?"

"Am I not a sorcerer? Many things are open to me. You have lost your mother, but I have sent into the town for her. She will be here soon. Come!" And without another word he turned on his heel and stalked off towards a dark tent before which someone had now lighted a fire.

Abdul Aziz followed through the darkness, which now seemed warm and friendly, towards the tiny red star on the earth. He had come to his new home, and life stretched before him, a great and stirring adventure. His heart was at peace.



CHAPTER VIII

THE next morning Abdul Aziz waked very early. It was not yet light, and all he could see at first was a faint streak of grey, like a grey crack across the darkness. For an instant he could not remember where he was.

He sat up to make sure, and as he did so his head scraped on something that was a yielding roof just above his couch. He knew then, and his eyes popped open like a robin's with pleasure. He was on the desert!

As his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom he saw that he was lying on a pile of sheep-skins at the edge of the tent. Near him his mother Kadijah lay, her head pillowed on her arm. She was smiling in her sleep, for she had come home.

The tent was very low, so low that even in the middle, beside the tallest pole, a man could only just stand upright. At the edge, where the boy lay, the roof of camel's hair came down to the ground, so that his sheep-skins were just under it. The

tent was perhaps twelve feet across and ten feet deep, measuring on the ground, which was covered with a straw matting. Against the far side the boy could dimly see the huddled forms of other sleepers. The grey streak of light came from the tent-flap which was open a crack.

Very softly, so as not to awaken anyone, the boy rose and stole out of the tent. As he had lain down in his clothes, he had no dressing to do. He saw that around the edge of the tent a little rampart of sage-brush had been built, so that no blowing sand might come under the crack; and a space in front of the tent was also protected by this rampart, so that they might cook and eat undisturbed.

In the sky the night lingered, in spite of the streak of grey at the eastern horizon, and the morning star still blazed in the faint twilight. The boy took a deep breath and found the air sweet in his nostrils. The sense of infinite space about him brought a little shock of pleasure. After his life in the village it seemed to him that he had found something for which he had been dimly longing, something he had never known but which had lain waiting in his blood.

The streak of grey in the east was growing every moment brighter and the dim forms of the other tents were taking shape in the dawn. They looked so little and low in that great space! It was as though nature spoke to the boy and said: "See how small man is! He is hardly a shadow on my great breast. Yet he is my child, my son. And here he is free." As the light turned from grey to gold and a faint wind stirred across the waste Abdul Aziz flung his arms outward in a gesture of sheer pleasure.

As soon as it was light the rest of the camp began to awake. From each of the tents came tall men dressed in loose garments of white wool with woollen scarfs tied carelessly over their heads, who walked with long swinging strides, as tigers walk, and women in red or deep blue who lighted fire-pots. There were children too who looked curiously at the new-comer. And everywhere about the camp the animals were already awake, the camels lying quietly on their folded legs, smiling to themselves, the old sheep with fat tails moving about lipping the ground for a tiny spear of desert herb that might be growing even here, while the young lambs gambolled beside them. The horses,

beautiful slim beasts, strained a little at their ropes where they were picketed close beside the tents. The donkeys tried gingerly to eat the cactus without pricking themselves too much on its sharp spines. And a number of thin and savage dogs came out from behind the tents and barked at Abdul Aziz.

Presently the flap of the tent where he had slept was raised and a young girl came out, a slim girl whom he had seen the night before. She was dressed in a faded red garment and her arms and legs were tattooed with the mark of the tribe in blue dots. She smiled sleepily at the boy and busied herself making a little fire of brush, over which she hung an iron pot. After a bit the good odor of boiling lamb came from it and the boy knew suddenly that he was hungry.

He looked about him for water, for the Koran is very strict on the subject of washing. As he did so a tall man strolled over from one of the other tents and spoke to him.

"Good morning, son of Kadijah," he said kindly. "May your day be blessed."

"And yours fortunate," answered the boy.

Then he added, "Where can I find the well that I may wash?"

The man smiled at this, but not unkindly. "Child of the city," he said, "it is true that the Prophet commanded us to wash five times a day, but he did not say that we must always wash with water. He knew very well that often there is none. And here there is water only for drinking and cooking. Come, I will show you."

Abdul Aziz was somewhat taken aback at this, but he followed the man in silence till they came to a spot of clean white sand. Here the man stooped and taking it in his hands, he rubbed his feet, his hands, and even his face carefully with the dry particles. The boy followed suit and was surprised to find how much cleaner and fresher he felt. Afterwards he learned that the Bedouins also anoint their faces with fat from the sheep's tail.

As they walked back towards the tent the man spoke again.

"What is your name, child of the city?" he asked.

"Abdul Aziz ben Sadoc," answered the boy. "And yours?"

"Youssef, son of Mohammed. They say your father is dead. If you need a friend, come to me." So saying, he nodded casually and strolled away as he had come. The boy looked after him gratefully—and went in to breakfast.

So began his life with the Bedouins. After the orderly existence in the village it seemed to the boy strangely haphazard, and thoroughly delightful. There was much work to be done of course, for every necessity must be wrenched from an unwilling climate, but the Bedouins were very casual about it, as they were about everything. When they felt like working they worked, and when they felt like eating they ate. Much of the time they just sat about the camp plaiting mats and ropes of dry grasses to sell in the town, smoking cigarettes, or just sitting. The women worked more steadily than the men. They cooked and looked after the babies, they carded wool, they spun and wove. They did not wash much, and as they had only the simplest necessities, there was no housecleaning to be done. When one spot got mussy, they just moved the tent somewhere else, and the wind and the sun cleaned up the old place. Nobody dreamed of such a thing as school!

Abdul Aziz saw very little of his grandfather, for the old sorcerer was the chief of the tribe and lived, with the four wives the Prophet allowed him, in a tent at some distance from the others. Everyone stood rather in awe of him, and his word was law.

At first the boy did not understand many of the customs of the desert, and the children mocked him good-humoredly. But they took him into the games they played in the sand, with stones and bits of dried sheep-dung, as hard as stones, for counters. And he taught them in return some of the village games. His mother seemed very happy and laughed and sang at her work. She helped him with the strange customs, and his new friend Youssef came steadily to his rescue. Soon a fast friendship sprang up between them and the boy would follow Youssef at his tasks, watching closely how he did them and learning quickly a hundred new things.

He learned to ride a rocking camel for hours together without growing tired, and that is no easy thing to do, for a camel jerks you backward and forward till you feel that your spine will break in the middle, like a wire that is bent too

often. He learned to dig the sage-brush for its strong roots that go so far into the soil in search of water, and to pack them skillfully on the camel's back, to sell for fire-wood in the town. He learned to find and to prepare the grasses that grow beside the scanty water-courses, and to weave them into ropes and mats for the camels' backs. He learned to tell directions by the sun by day and the stars by night, and he learned to live on dates, boiled meat, mare's milk, cheese and tea—with never quite enough of any of them. He lost every spare ounce of fat on his body and grew lean and tireless as the Bedouins themselves who seem sometimes as though their bodies were made of steel. Before long the children had ceased to mock him, and in a few weeks it seemed to Abdul Aziz that his past life in the village was only a dream that had happened in some earlier world, and that he had always lived this old free life of the desert, that is as old as man.

But perhaps the chief charm of the camp to the boy lay in the animals, which seemed almost as important as the people. Indeed they were important, for without animals men could not live

on the desert at all. Here where so little grows men live almost entirely on what the animals give them. The camel gives them hair to make their tents, which are their houses, and serves as their train and express wagon. Their woollen garments come from the sheep. Meat, and milk, come from all the animals. Donkeys and horses are their automobiles, which they ride proudly. A Bedouin on the desert with no animals would have nothing to eat, nothing to wear, and nowhere to live. So they are very careful of their flocks.

Abdul Aziz spent endless long lazy days with the animals. His friend Youssef came to trust him with his flocks and the boy would drive them to the wells and water-courses, and pasture them on the scanty grass and herbs near the city.

He liked them all, but one day he made a very special chum to whom later he was to owe his fortune and, for the matter of that, his life.

Nobody could have told though to look at it that it was to be such an important creature. For it was only a funny, fuzzy young donkey, whose legs were still too long for its body, and whose big ears were always busy turning this way and

that. It was a light brown color, almost golden, and it was neatly trimmed with black and white on its nose and feet.

This is the way Abdul Aziz came to make a chum of it.

One morning Youssef said to the boy. "Son of Kadijah, I have a task for you today. Take this load of sage-brush to the town and sell it in the market place for fire-wood. I will give you a fifth part of what you get for it for your own."

The boy was delighted. He was good at selling things, and he liked the market place. He liked money too, for even a Bedouin can use money. So he set off in high spirits, driving the old white camel on which the brush was loaded. It was very early in the morning, and the shadow of himself and the camel stretched out long in front of him across the waste. He sang loudly and thumped the camel on the rump.

But presently he heard little galloping feet behind him and there, pounding along gaily in the fresh morning air, came this golden brown donkey. It was too young to be put to work yet, and it felt frisky as a young dog.

"Go home, Son of Satan!" called the boy, and threw sand at it, for there were no stones to throw.

But the donkey paid not the slightest attention to him. It wheeled round when the sand came at it, so as not to get it in its eyes. Then it skirted about, flapping its ears and braying loudly for the sheer pleasure of being alive. Abdul Aziz couldn't help laughing, and when the donkey persisted in trotting after him like a pet dog, he gave up trying to discourage it. When they came near the city of Kairouan the boy caught the little beast, took out a piece of grass rope and tied it about the creature's neck. Youssef would never forgive him if he lost the donkey in town.

So they came into the market place together. Abdul Aziz made his camel lie down, tied the donkey to a post and looked about for a customer. But he didn't have very good luck today. Rather early, to be sure, a man bought half the load, but the other half went begging. Not that the boy minded much. Time is a matter of great indifference to an Arab, and they would just as soon wait

five hours as one. "Why be in a hurry," they say. "Only Roumis"—foreigners—"are in a hurry. Allah gives his sons patience."

So the boy waited, watching the busy market place, while the long sunny day wore on. He ate his dates at noon, watered the camel and the donkey—the Son of Satan, as he had already named it—from the well and fed them some grass. It was well on towards dusk when the last of his load was sold. Then he made ready to go home.

But the old white camel thought otherwise. Calmly and quietly, but most determinedly, it refused to get up. Abdul Aziz tried pulling the halter and shouting. No result. The camel didn't want to walk all the way back to camp just then. The boy tried pushing it from behind. That didn't help matters. Then he beat it with a rope and even kicked it with his bare feet as hard as he could, but that hurt his feet more than it did the camel. The beast grunted a little and showed its teeth, but it wouldn't budge.

Abdul Aziz was growing annoyed and a man standing near came over to help. They both pulled and hauled together, but still the camel would not get up.

Kairouan.

By this time the whole corner of the market-place was interested, and half a dozen men came over. Two pulled on the rope, two pushed from behind and two beat. The camel grunted angrily now, baring his teeth and trying to bite. But that was all. It was growing very late and Abdul Aziz began to be afraid he would get no dinner.

He thought very hard, and finally he had one last idea. He took some sage-brush and, lifting up the camel's tail, he built a little fire under it. But when his tail got too hot the beast only shuffled forward a bit on his knees, out of reach of the fire, and settled down again, grunting. All the men took to laughing then and went away. The market was closing for the day and the boy was soon left alone.

"Mektoub!" thought Abdul Aziz fatalistically. "I shall have to spend the night here. In the morning it will move. But what will Youssef and my mother think?" And he sat down to wait.

But right here the little golden donkey, the Son of Satan, took a hand. It wanted to go home, and it seemed to understand the situation. From where it was tied it could just reach the camel, and very quietly it went over and hung its small

head down beside the camel's great shaggy neck. What it may have said to the camel in some mysterious language they both understood Abdul Aziz never knew. But in a few moments, very slowly and with an immense dignity, the camel got to its feet and started off towards home.

The boy was so delighted that he took a sou or two of his brush money and from a food shop that was still open he bought some carrots for the Son of Satan. From that moment they were always together.

But one day Kadijah sent her son on an errand to town, an errand on which he could not take the donkey. When he came home at dusk he saw Youssef at the edge of the encampment, shading his eyes and looking across the waste.

"Abdul Aziz," the man said, "your little friend the Son of Satan is lost. Not having you to play with, it wandered away from camp—and it has not come back."

The boy's heart skipped a beat with dismay. When he had given his mother her purchases he ran quickly to the edge of the camp and wandered disconsolately about as the night came down, peering and calling. But no little feet came run-

ning to meet him and no fuzzy brown head could he find to caress.

"Tomorrow," thought Abdul Aziz, "tomorrow I shall surely find him."

But it was a miserable boy who finally fell asleep on his couch of sheep-skins.

CHAPTER IX

On the morrow with the dawn Abdul Aziz was abroad and scouring the country for his lost pet. He rode on a donkey borrowed from Youssef, and he set out full of hope.

He thought at first that he might be able to track the Son of Satan by his foot-prints, but when he looked closely at the sand he saw that this was not possible. Here near the camp there were too many prints of animals coming and going. There were the great padded prints of camels, rounded prints of horses and smaller rounded prints of donkeys, tiny divided prints of sheep and goats—and all crossing and recrossing one another in a hopeless maze. Among them all it would be impossible to pick out the little prints

he sought. Besides, there was a sort of crust on the sand and the prints were not deeply marked. So he had to give up this hope almost as soon as it was born.

Nevertheless he rode out bravely and went hither and thither across the plain, straining his eyes for a small golden brown figure. The sun rose higher and higher in the sky, beating down mercilessly on the sand, and underfoot the tiny lizards and the black flies moved and scurried. Abdul Aziz pulled the hood of his woollen bournous over his head, for in this dry country a woollen garment keeps out the cold by night and the sun by day, shutting in and conserving the moisture of the body. Towards noon the heat mirages began to shimmer, wavering and sinking, and showing in the distance—always in the distance—their enticing lines of green. The boy was much too wise to be deceived by any of them, but he wondered whether the little Son of Satan would know them for what they were, or whether he had followed one of them far away.

So the long hot hours passed, and as the time grew longer hope grew fainter. In the evening he returned to camp empty-handed as he went.

"You have tried bravely, son of Kadijah," said Youssef to the tired, unhappy boy. "It is fate. Think no more of it. A donkey is not worth so much labor."

"But this donkey is worth it!" answered the boy sturdily. "Tomorrow I shall try again." Youssef only looked at him and, with a gesture of indifference, passed on.

True to his word the boy started out again the next morning, but with no very clear idea of where he should go, since he had tried all the likely places the day before. About noon, after wandering a long time, he lay down to rest and eat a few dates in the shade of a single rock that jutted into the plain. The donkey he had ridden stood beside him with drooping head. In the sky far above a large bird, a vulture or a buzzard, circled and drifted in apparent idleness.

After a bit, as Abdul Aziz watched it lazily, the bird left its drifting and flew away to the northward in a swift purposeful flight. A sudden thought came to the boy and he sprang to his feet and followed it with his eyes. It flew northward for a considerable distance, then dived downward towards the plain.

"It is a chance!" thought Abdul Aziz, and mounting the unwilling donkey he set out after the bird. Long before he got there he had lost the exact spot on the shimmering plain, but when he was despairing of finding it, a second bird swooped out of the sky and dropped down like the first. The boy forced his mount into a trot.

After what seemed a very long time he reached a little gully which he knew for a dried water course. For in this desert plain the rains sometimes fall with great violence, cutting out channels for themselves before the waters sink into the thirsty sands. This channel was narrow and strewn with rocks and gravel.

Suddenly his heart gave a great leap, for he saw that his quest was rewarded and that it was indeed his own Son of Satan on whom the vultures hoped to dine. The donkey lay huddled up and motionless in the middle of the gully, and around him sat a ring of the great ugly birds, waiting with horrible patience till the poor beast should be dead. When the boy rode up, waving his arms and shouting, they rose angrily, and with raucous cries circled about him. He dismounted and threw

stones at them till, still crying, they circled away and were gone in the blazing sky.

Then he bent over the donkey. At the sight of him the Son of Satan's pitiful eyes grew bright. It flapped its ears and tried to rise. But it was too weak to do so, and sank down again. Quickly Abdul Aziz examined it to see what had kept it here, and saw that the poor beast had jammed one of its forefeet between two sharp rocks with such force that it could not get it out again. It had lain here in the terrible sun, without water and in pain, till its strength was nearly gone.

The boy petted it and gave it water from a goat-skin bag he carried. Then he set to work to dig about one of the rocks and loosen it till the swollen foot could be set free. It was a long task, but it was done at last; and the donkey, refreshed by the water, struggled painfully to its feet. Abdul Aziz examined the leg and found to his delight that it was not broken, only cut and bruised by the sharp rock. He threw his arms around the fuzzy neck of his pet and the donkey, raising his head, let out a feeble bray that seemed to the boy the sweetest music he had ever heard.

Late that afternoon a happy boy, followed by

a limping donkey, came into the Bedouin camp and greeted Youssef.

"By Sidi Bou Ali!" cried his friend. "You have found him after all. It is a good deed."

"Yes, I have found him," was the boy's only answer, but his eyes were smiling.

"Listen, Abdul Aziz," said the man then. "Since you have cared so much for him and saved him from death, from this day he shall be your own donkey, to do with as you choose."

"May Allah grant you happiness on this earth, and a high seat in Paradise!" cried the boy thankfully, and he kissed the white robe of Youssef.

Then he set off to find his mother. Kadijah was sitting in the door of the tent carding wool. She had two paddles, like wire brushes, and between them she pulled and separated the wool, shaking out the dirt from it and making it fluffy. When she saw her son coming with the limping donkey she jumped up, dropping the paddles, and ran to meet him.

"Allah is merciful!" she cried delightedly, "You have found the black-trimmed one! Bring him to me and I will put ointment on his leg and bind it up. But first tell me how you found him."

So the boy told her the story of the vultures and of how afterwards Youssef had given him the Son of Satan for his own. Kadijah's eyes lighted at this and she smiled a gay little smile the boy had often seen on her face, now that she was a Bedouine. Then she said softly.

"Youssef is a kind man, as kind as your own father, on whom be peace. As for you, my son, I am proud of you. May you live to lead our tribe to glory, like the men of the great old days when our people ruled the earth!"

Then she went for the ointment.

The next day at dusk an old and shrunken Bedouine, toothless and bent, came to the boy as he sat before his tent. He knew her at once as the oldest of the four wives of his grandfather.

"May your goods increase, grandmother," he said.

"And yours multiply. Hear now. Si Maroc your grandfather wishes to see you at once." The boy sprang to his feet, for this was the first time his grandfather had noticed him since the night he first came to the encampment, and he stood much in awe of the stern old man. As he followed

In the door of the tent carding wool.

the woman towards the tent of the chief, which stood at some distance from the others, he was wondering uneasily what might be the cause of the summons.

When they reached the tent the old woman went in first, signing to the boy to wait. After an instant his grandfather's deep voice said, "Enter, son of Kadijah, and be welcome."

The boy lifted the flap of the tent and entered.

The dusk was already falling outside and within the tent all was dark, except for the light of a small fire that glowed in a fire-pot. Above it, his face picked out by the ruddy glow, sat the old sorcerer. He was wrapped in a great robe with a sort of headdress on whose folds were painted strange kabalistic figures and designs, a "hand of Fatma" with two thumbs, a moon, a dog chasing its tail, the star of Solomon. His face wore a strange more-than-natural calm and the boy shivever a little with excitement.

"Abdul Aziz," said the old man in a voice as unnatural as his face, yet not an unkindly voice, "By the grace of Allah and the help of Sidi Moulay ben Idress you have recovered your donkey

which was lost. In this you have chosen the better part of fate. I feel that the djinn are with you. Sit, while I look into the future."

So the boy crouched against the side of the tent while the sorcerer, who seemed already to have forgotten his presence, began his magic. From the folds of his robe he produced two little packets, from each of which he took a pinch of dark powder. These he threw on the burning charcoal in the fire-pot. A spurt of flame went up and a deep pungent odor of strange incense filled the low tent.

Then he began to beat on a pottery drum, softly at first, but the music growing every moment louder, and more weird in its strange rhythm. As he played he leaned forward over the firepot, inhaling in deep breaths the magic odor of the burning perfumes. Slowly his eyes turned upward till only the white was visible. The boy pressed backward against the skin of the tent, hardly daring to breathe.

For some time this went on. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the music stopped. The old man threw aside the drum, his eyes came down from his head and fixed themselves at a distance, as

The old woman went in. ssssssss

though he were looking far away into some realm of which the boy knew nothing. From a fold of his headdress he took the magic talisman, the *nufra*, made from the powdered gall of a black hen, a hoopoe, a black ox and a jackal, mixed with henna and antimony. This, in its little bag of hyena's hide, he set on the ground beside him, and around it drew weird signs and diagrams. At the same time he muttered words in a language the boy could not understand. Abdul Aziz, watching breathlessly, saw that the skin on his face seemed to be crawling of itself, and heard the tiny sharp hiss as drops of perspiration fell from his face upon the glowing coals. Then he raised his head and with his eyes still fixed on the distance seemed for a long time to be listening to some voice inaudible to the listening boy. At last he nodded twice and began to speak in a slow clear voice.

"The djinn have come at my call, and have shown me what the future has in store," he said. "Their words are not for the ears of children, but this much I am allowed to tell you. Because of what you have done your protecting djinni resides now in the body of the small golden donkey.

And he sends you this message. 'When the donkey kicks in the dawn, look well! There lies your fortune.' "

When he had said this the old sorcerer seemed to sink into himself and sat motionless, brooding. The boy in the corner waited. Presently he felt a touch on his arm and, turning, saw that the old woman, whose presence he had forgotten, was leaning over him.

"It is ended," she whispered. "Go!"

So Abdul Aziz rose and stumbled out of the tent. The air outside was clear and cool and in the sky sharp stars had come out and were twinkling. The boy took a deep breath. After the heavy incense-laden air of the tent the night wind was sweet.

His head was whirling with the strangeness of what had passed and he felt almost as though he had visited some other world. And yet, perhaps because he had been to a French school and learned to think a little as the Europeans think, he only half believed what he had seen, and he found himself hoping his grandfather would not make such a magic often for him. "By Sidi

Sahab!" he thought, "my flesh feels all prickly." And he went slowly back to his own tent.

There Kadijah was awaiting him, curious to know what had happened. When he had told her she nodded with glowing eyes, and hugged him suddenly. But she only said:

"Remember the words of your djinni."

But if Abdul Aziz didn't quite believe in his grandfather's magic, he didn't quite disbelieve it either. The next morning, and for several mornings thereafter, he rose at dawn and went to find the little donkey, to see what might occur. But though the beast, being young and frisky, kicked more than once at dawn, nothing unusual happened. Finally one morning, when the boy had gone too close, it kicked a lot of sand into his eyes, which Abdul Aziz thought most unpleasant. "If that is what the djinni meant," thought the boy, "I do not care to know more about it." Thereafter he went about his affairs as usual, and soon forgot the whole incident, though from that day he stood more than ever in awe of his grandfather.

Under Kadijah's care the leg of the Son of Satan soon healed and before long was as stout

as the others. The donkey too was continuing to grow, as donkeys do, and one day not long after the wound was healed Youssef said to the boy.

"Your donkey is now big enough to bear your weight, which fortunately is not very great. See if you can ride him."

So Abdul Aziz climbed up, but came down faster than he went up and landed with his mouth full of sand.

"You ungrateful creature!" he sputtered, and tried again. This time the Son of Satan was not so surprised and the boy managed to stick on. Before long the two understood one another, and Abdul Aziz would ride about on his fuzzy friend, sitting sidewise very far back on its rump and kicking his feet in the air to make the beast go faster.

It was one hot day not so long after this that a new adventure, and a surprising one, befell the boy. Partly, he thought afterwards, it was his own fault. He should not have gone so far away from camp with Youssef's camels. But he was curious to see what lay to the southward, across the silver line of the track of the iron caravan. So when Youssef asked him to pasture his six camels the

boy drove them southward across the plain, leaving the city of Kairouan away to the right and behind him. He had chosen to ride the Son of Satan, rather than one of the rocking camels.

The adventure began after he had crossed the tracks and found nothing but the same desert plain, except that he saw ahead a little rise of rougher country. Four Bedouins mounted on tall camels, who were also going southward, came up with him from behind. Abdul Aziz saw them coming, but thought little of it. The country is at peace under the French and travellers, meeting one another on the desert, speak and pass on. But when these men came close to him he did not like their faces. Especially the leader, an unusually tall man even for a Bedouin, with a deep scar across his right cheek, looked at the boy in a most unfriendly way. Nevertheless the boy spoke politely.

"May Allah protect you," he called as they came near.

But the leader did not return the greeting. Instead he gave an order in a low voice to his followers, who presently to Abdul Aziz' dismay spread out and began to urge Youssef's camels

forward at a swifter pace. The boy felt a sudden sinking in the pit of his stomach. The men were robbers! He looked quickly about for help, but the great plain was empty as far as his eye could reach. Then his courage returned, his cheeks grew very red, and he spoke bravely, like a man.

"These are the camels of Youssef ben Mohammed," he said. "By Sidi Okbar, you would best leave them alone! The Ouled ben Idress can protect their own!"

But the leader spoke now in a harsh voice. "A fig for the Ouled ben Idress! We need the camels and we shall take them."

"Sons of perdition, may you roast in four fires!" cried the boy. "Wait till my grandfather the sorcerer gets after you!"

But it was no use. The leader only eyed him coldly and drew a French pistol from his robe.

"As for you," he said coldly, "if we leave you here, you will spread the alarm, which would not suit me. I am considering what to do with you." And he balanced the pistol in his hand.

The boy's heart gave a great leap and then stopped. A sort of calm came over him. "Mek-

toub! What is to be, is written," he thought "Here I shall die."

But one of the other men spoke up quickly.

"The French are very finicky," he said. "It would go hard with us if they caught us. Let us rather take the boy with us. He is too young to do us harm."

The other men agreed in gutturals. For an instant the leader hesitated; then he put away the pistol.

"So be it!" he said at last. "Go forward with the camels quietly and all will be well. But make us trouble and—" he tapped the pistol meaningly.

Abdul Aziz' heart began to beat again in great throbs that shook him painfully. But he had no choice.

"I will go," was all he said.

CHAPTER X

THE robber Bedouins urged their mounts and the captured camels of Youssef forward at a smart pace towards the southward. With them, since he could not help it, rode Abdul Aziz on the Son of Satan. The boy's heart was like a hot stone in him, and his head buzzed like a whole hive of bees. But he went silently, making no further protest.

Very soon they reached the stretch of higher ground, where the going was more difficult. And here, looking down in front of him, the boy saw a great white glittering plain, with edges like a lake and smooth as a floor. It stretched away to the far horizon.

He was riding near the end of the cavalcade and the man who had taken his part chanced to be near. The boy dared not speak, but he looked inquiringly at the man, whom the others had

called Mahmoud. The robber answered the unspoken question.

"Salt!" he said tersely.

It was indeed the dry bed of a great salt lake from which the fierce sun had sucked up all the water. When they had come down upon it the boy saw that the white glitter was caused by a thick coating of hard salt. On it the feet of the Son of Satan made a crackling sound. Once, when they had dismounted for a moment, he broke a piece of the crust and found it two or three inches thick.

Over this level ground they made good time and by nightfall had covered many a weary mile. Towards the last the little Son of Satan lagged painfully, in spite of all the boy's urging, and when they finally stopped for the night, still on the featureless salt plain, the boy took his skin bag of water and gave the last drops to the donkey which looked gratefully at him out of tired eyes.

At the place where the robbers had stopped, some dried camels' dung lay on the salty ground. Of this they made a little fire and brewed themselves tea. Mahmoud gave the boy a drink of this and a handful of dates, for Abdul Aziz' lunch had been eaten long ago and he had no other food.

Then they hobbled the camels, tying their feet together as Amor ben Nila had tied the feet of his bubbling camel before the gates of Hammamet, wrapped themselves in their bournouses, and lay down to sleep. But before doing so one of the men bound the boy securely with a rope, fastening his hands behind him and his feet together. Poor Abdul Aziz was almost choking with rage but he submitted quietly enough. It would have been folly to struggle. He waited till all was still, then tried furiously to free himself. But it was no use. The ropes were too firmly tied. And after a while, overcome by a great weariness, the boy also slept, under the wide and quiet stars that take no count of human good and evil.

The next morning the men waked before dawn, and, after eating a few more dates, set off as before. Abdul Aziz, stiff and sore as he was from his bonds, climbed on one of Youssef's camels, knowing his weight too much for the little donkey on such a long journey. And the donkey, free now of his burden, went more easily.

So another day passed, and another night. The second day was as the first save that in the afternoon they passed the edge of the salt lake and

camped more comfortably beside a well, where they all drank their fill. The country here was gently rolling and once in a while they passed a spot of green where a house stood and a few bushes grew. Here, as in most places in Tunisia, where the soil has water it is fertile enough.

Here too there were roads and now and again people passed them, Arabs going to market, or moving Bedouins like themselves. Once too a swift French motor car tore past, scattering the camels like scared chickens. The leader shook his closed fist after the car with a curse for the "pigs of infidels." But his captors spoke to no one and the boy dared not make a sign.

On the second morning the boy saw not far away a huge gaunt structure of grey stone which reared great ruined arches into the cloudless sky. He looked at it in amazement. In this open country it rose almost like a small mountain, a mountain made by man, and long since abandoned. Abdul Aziz had seen near Hammamet small crumbling ruins which his father explained had been left by a race of Roumis—they were really the ancient Romans—who had once ruled this country centuries before. The boy now guessed that here

was a greater ruin of the same sort, and he wished to go closer to look at it.

But his captors passed close beside it and went on. Yet for hours as they went the boy could look back from the tops of little rises and see the gaunt arches against the horizon. He counted it a landmark, and he determined to explore it if ever he could get back.

This day the Bedouins travelled more slowly. Evidently their fear of pursuit had lessened with time. They seemed in a better humor and even the fierce leader with the scarred face jested once or twice. The boy gathered from their talk that they were nearing their own tribe after a journey which had taken them far north of where he had met them. He decided that they had only gathered in Youssef's camels by the way.

But now the boy had formed a plan of escape and towards evening he acted on it. For several hours he complained bitterly of weariness—which he did not really feel—until the leader told him harshly to keep quiet. When they stopped finally beside a trickle of water he slid heavily from his camel, fell in a sprawling heap and lay still, feigning the sleep of utter exhaustion. Mahmoud, who

was kinder than the others, shook him gently to give him dates and water, but he made no sign. The robbers then left him and lit their own fire. Before they slept the leader came to the motionless figure and turned it over roughly with his foot. Still Abdul Aziz did not move; only he gave a deep sigh. One of the men bound him as he had done the two nights before; but this time he was careless, thinking the boy too tired to move.

When all was quiet Abdul Aziz began slowly, moving as quietly as a hunting animal, to free himself from his bonds. It was slow work and painful, for even in his carelessness the robber had made the knots firmly. But this time it was possible. After what seemed to the boy an eternity he got one hand free. The rest was easier and at last it was accomplished.

Still the boy did not at first rise but lay taking stock of his position. There was a small moon shining and by its light he could see objects near him. The Bedouins, sleeping in a little group, lay only a few feet from him. He knew they slept lightly, like all healthy creatures who live close to nature. Further away the camels knelt, all but one which was moving slowly about in its hobbled

fashion. Beyond the robbers the little Son of Satan stood, its legs also tied together, its head hanging down and its eyes closed.

Slowly, very slowly, Abdul Aziz began to crawl along the ground. Once one of the men turned over and the boy held his breath in fear. But the robber did not wake, and presently the boy started on again. He made no sound on the sandy soil as he circled past the sleeping men and came to the little animal. He knew that he could go further and more surely if he took the camel, but he loved the donkey and he chose his friend.

When he had come quite close he stood up beside the donkey, laid his hand on the animal's nose and whispered softly into its long ear. He was in mortal terror lest the Son of Satan should bray, and so lose all. But his fuzzy friend only opened its eyes and looked at him quietly. The boy stooped, and after some difficulty loosened the rope that tied its feet. Then he put his arm around the donkey's neck and began quietly to lead it to safety.

So they stole away. And fate was kind. The cool night covered them and the robbers slept on. When they were finally out of sight Abdul Aziz

mounted the donkey and urged him to a trot. His pet seemed to understand and, tired as it was, it set off smartly towards the north.

After an hour the boy felt that he was safe. He leaned over and spoke to the Son of Satan.

"Now," he said, "we are even. I saved your life and you are saving mine, for without you I could never reach home. When we get back I shall buy you five whole kilos of carrots!" Then he added as an afterthought, "And if you really are my protecting djinni, may Allah reward you as a djinni should be rewarded!"

For a while longer they travelled on. But after all they were only a boy and a young donkey, and when the small moon set they were too weary to go further. So the boy chose a little gully where they would not be noticed and dismounted. Here they both fell sound asleep, and when they waked the sun was already high in the heavens.

The donkey breakfasted on some young cactus that grew beside the way, but Abdul Aziz, who had had no supper the night before, was ravenously hungry. He felt a corner of his bournous where he had tied up a franc before leaving camp, and found to his delight that it was still safe. The

robbers had not thought it worth while to search him. But the franc could not be used today if he was to eat on the white salt lake. So he begged Arab bread and some carobs from an obliging farmer's wife in a place where there was water.

Then they set out on the long way home.

A little after noon the boy saw on the horizon the great ruined building which had made him so curious the day before. "This time I shall look at it," said Abdul Aziz to himself, and steered towards it across the plain.

But it was farther away than it looked and it kept retreating uncomfortably before them, so that the sun had almost set before they reached it. Seen against the sunset glow the great gaunt arches, set in a huge oval, seemed to reach into the sky, making the cluster of squat Arab houses around its base look not much higher than toadstools.

The people who lived in the houses must all have been at supper, for the boy saw no one, and he and the Son of Satan trotted up unnoticed to a great hole on one side where the arches are broken down. Here there was a barbed wire, but the two of them slipped under it and went in.

Abdul Aziz looked about him. And suddenly he seemed to himself to shrink; to grow small and most insignificant. The place was so gigantic, and it was so lonely!

In it, when it was new, sixty thousand people could sit on great banks of marble seats, crowned by the gaunt arches, to watch tremendous spectacles in the arena below. Here gladiators fought and chariot races were run. Here tawny African lions shook their manes. And to this amphitheatre, twenty miles from the sea, water was brought by an underground passage to turn the arena into a lake for naval fights and pageants. For this huge coliseum of El Djem was built by the ancient Romans when centuries ago they conquered and ruled all of North Africa. And then it did not stand, as it does today, on an arid empty plain, for this same plain was green with gardens, and cities and villages rose on every side, which centuries ago have been swallowed by the drought and the sand.

All this history Abdul Aziz could not know, but now, crumbling and falling into ruin, in the red light of the sunset glow, the great amphitheatre seemed like something more than mortal, as

though a race of giants had sported there. And it was lonely with a great loneliness, the loneliness of the dead past as well as of the living present.

The boy's breath came a little short and he held his head very high as he walked with the Son of Satan into the arena. The donkey's hoofs rang sharp in the stillness and a flight of bats whirled about them in the twilight.

But the boy was not daunted. He tied the donkey to a stone and set out to explore the ruins. He scrambled over the broken seats and mounted crumbling marble staircases. He went down vaulted hallways, and under the floor of the whole he peered gingerly into dark passageways and little cells which must have been dark even at noonday. Now, in the dusk and the silence, when even the scraping of his own bare feet sounded loud in the stillness, they were doubly strange and eerie. He wondered what the people could have been like who used these passageways; and he shivered a little as the twilight bats whirled out of the darkness and brushed past him.

But in the open space of the arena, where the moon shone and his golden donkey stood waiting, his courage returned.

"Son of Satan," he said, "here we shall pass the night. For if we go into the village people will ask me questions, and I do not care to see any more strange people just now."

So he looked about for a place to sleep. But, because the floor was uneven and cumbered with broken masonry, he could not at first find a comfortable spot. At last, however, under an archway he found a level space. He hobbled the donkey's feet, wrapped himself in his bournous and lay down.

But it was long before he slept in his eerie bedroom. The gaunt arches in the moonlight, the tiers on tiers of crumbling seats, and the strange sense of a race of such builders gone like a puff of smoke haunted his imagination. He felt very small and lonely, and wished hard for the shelter of the tent of skins where his mother slept smiling. Even when he fell asleep he was haunted by dreams of a strange people who swarmed over the broken masonry and danced weird dances under the silver moon.

When he wakened the first grey streak of dawn was showing in the east. He rose stiffly and stretched himself. Then he looked about for the

Son of Satan. But the donkey was nowhere to be seen. Abdul Aziz wandered about the ruins, calling. If he had lost his pet so far from camp he would be lost indeed.

Then, from a passageway to the right he heard a thud and a rattle of stones. Quickly he ran in that direction. There in the dusky passage he saw the Son of Satan kicking up his heels in his morning gambol, and out of pure sport trying his hoofs against the piles of rubble on the flooring. As the boy came near the heels thrashed again and he heard a sharp crack like that made by breaking pottery. Then the words of his grandfather the sorcerer came to his mind. "When the donkey kicks in the dawn, look carefully!"

He held his breath with excitement—and looked.

There among the crumbling rubble lay the broken pieces of an ancient pottery jar, and on the ground, in a gleaming shower, lay dozens and dozens of gold pieces, big thick shining gold pieces. And on each of them was the head and superscription of a Roman emperor gone to dust these many centuries.

Big thick shining gold pieces.sss

CHAPTER XI

Two days later, when the sun was hanging in a golden ball over the sacred city of Kairouan, a boy and a donkey came into the camp of the Ouled ben Idress.

They were tired, but they were happy. The long journey back, over the dried salt lake, had passed without mishap and under his bournous Abdul Aziz was still clutching the cloth—it was part of his shirt—in which he had wrapped the gold pieces.

The camp was quiet when he entered, for the men had not yet returned with the animals. No one saw him coming and he made straight for the tent of his mother. As he came near he saw that Kadijah was sitting in the doorway. But she

was not working. She sat in a little heap, her face buried in her hands, and his heart beat very quickly, for he knew that she was weeping.

He dismounted—and still she did not raise her head. Then Abdul Aziz ran forward with a glad cry and flung himself upon her. And as he did so there flashed across his mind, like a small bright picture, the remembrance of the time he had come home to Hammamet to stop his own wake. But this time Kadijah did not burst into the terrible sobbing. She only clasped him very tight and smiled at him through her tears.

"Your grandfather told me you were safe. He told me," she said. "But O my son, it was hard to believe!"

A little later, when the camp was alive again and he was telling for the tenth time the story of the robber Bedouins and of how he had found the gold pieces, he saw his grandfather coming and ran towards him to kiss his robe.

The old man smiled and patted the boy's head. "The djinni told me truth," he said. "The spirit of Moulay ben Idress protected you, and you have done well. But it is not fitting that a small boy should carry with him so much treasure. Give

me the gold and I will sell it for you. In this form we cannot pass it." Then he turned to the other excited Bedouins who stood listening. "And watch your tongues carefully, that no word of this gets to strangers, lest we also meet with robbers."

In the morning the old man went alone to the city. It was late when he returned and sent for Abdul Aziz.

"Son of Kadijah," he said, looking at the boy with his piercing eyes which seemed to look through the boy to something beyond. "You are now the richest among us. Fate was kind and sent a party of tourists from beyond the seas who bought the gold, asking no inconvenient questions. Here is your wealth." And he showed the boy a large package of French bank-notes.

Abdul Aziz looked at them and a sudden sense of disappointment came over him.

"The—the gold was so much prettier!" he said.

A smile lightened the stern face of the old sorcerer. "True, my son. But it was of no use to us." Then he went on more seriously. "These also I will keep for you, till you need them. For you must not spend them recklessly, and long must you reflect, and hard, before you part with them."

Then, seeing that the boy's face fell in spite of himself, he added: "But see, with a little of the money I have bought this silver necklace for Kadijah, and this saddle for you—and the Son of Satan."

He showed the boy a saddle of fine embroidered leather, studded with silver. It had a pointed horn in front and a red saddle-cloth to hang over the donkey's rump. "It is a saddle for a blooded mare," he said. "No donkey of the tribe has ever worn one. But the Son of Satan is no ordinary donkey!"

Abdul Aziz was wild with delight and kissed the old man's robe again and again. "May Allah reward you!" he cried with shining eyes.

"You shall ride him at the fantasia," said the sorcerer. But when the boy said, "A fantasia means a wedding, and who is to be married?" he only smiled again. Then he grew sober.

He took from the package of bank-notes two bills of a thousand francs each. "These you must pay to Youssef for the camels you lost him by going too far afield. That also is just. Go now and do so. And tell the camp to prepare. Tomorrow before dawn we leave this place and turn south-

ward. The season of rains is beginning and there will be pasture in the southlands."

So at dawn the next day the Bedouin camp had become a caravan.

The tents had been folded up and loaded on the camels. Donkeys carried the smaller paraphernalia. The young women sat among the camels' loads, high on the swaying humps, carrying the little babies. The old women walked, often with large bundles on their heads, for to the Bedouins an old woman, alas, is not much more than a weaker beast of burden. The old sorcerer, on a beautiful Arabian horse, led the way followed by other men on horseback, while the older children, the sheep and the goats trudged in the rear.

But Abdul Aziz rode proudly upon the Son of Satan on his new saddle studded with silver, and strange long thoughts churned in his head. Through the long hot days he pondered, as the caravan pushed on, for the finding of the gold had made him suddenly feel older. Boy that he was, he began to feel as a man feels that wealth is a responsibility as well as a pleasure. "A rich man," said Abdul Aziz to himself, "is important. What he does is important. When I was only a

poor boy, who cared what I did? But now—now I must be careful. And what shall I do, oh, *what* shall I do with the money?"

In the evenings the tribe pitched their camp beside a well or a trickle of water, or sometimes in the open plain. They made little fires of sagebrush that twinkled like red stars in the great empty spaces. And, when the cooking was done and the children slept, the men sat about the fires smoking French cigarettes and talking. Now and again one would beat on the darbouka, the pottery drum, and another would play on the sweet Arab flute strange haunting tunes that rose and fell beneath the heavy golden stars of heaven like music from another world. Wrapped in their bournouses, for as soon as the sun sets it grows bitter cold on the desert, the men sat like statues of peace. And with them sat Abdul Aziz, thinking, always thinking.

And if time had suddenly stood still and they had met on the way that older Bedouin chief, Abraham the patriarch of the Hebrews, wandering with Sarah his wife and his many flocks, neither would have been much surprised. For on

the desert time leaves little trace and man is today as he was then.

When they had been gone a week the boy rode up to the old sorcerer and, after he had kissed his robe, asked him, "Where are we going, O my grandfather?"

For a moment the old man was silent, looking across the shimmering plain, then he answered slowly.

"Far in the desert lies a green oasis, cool with streams of living water. Men call it Nefta, the Pearl of the Desert. Thither are we going." Nefta! Abdul Aziz rejoiced, for much had he heard of the gardens of Nefta, and much had he longed to see them.

So they pushed on. Gradually, as they went, the country grew more and more arid. Wells grew scarcer and little by little they came into the true Sahara, the great desert that stretches, a bare and dead world of its own, all across Africa.

A strange world it is, for it has mountains, valleys and plains like the living world, save that nothing grows to cover the bare ribs of earth, and nothing moves but the great winds, and now and

again the wandering Bedouins. And the desert is of four sorts, the rock desert, the desert of dry salt lake beds, the desert of flat sand tied down by sage-brush and cactus, and the desert of moving dunes of sand. Over all these four plodded the caravan. But of moving dunes they saw the least.

The skin of the Bedouins grew taut and dry as parchment, and so dark that it was almost black. They had not an ounce of spare fat on their bodies and their eyes were always squinting for the great glare of the sun. But they drove on as the days stretched into weeks. Slowly, very slowly, the caravan crawled across the face of the country. They passed the oasis of Gafsa, where the Roman ruins are jagged in the sun, and many days later another oasis named Tozeur. Here Maroc spoke again to his grandson.

"Tomorrow," he said, "you and I will ride forward ahead of the others to Nefta. Next day they will overtake us there."

So they rose early, the old man and the young boy, and set off together across the desert of hard sand that is as flat as a table. They spoke little on

the way, but they pressed forward steadily. At noon they rested in the shade of a French blockhouse by the way, and in the afternoon they saw on the horizon the dusty green, jagged line of the palms of Nefta.

Maroc did not go in by the direct route, but circled a little way around the oasis, so that they came at last to a steep rise of hard red earth that stands here between the desert and the fertile ground. Here he stopped his horse, and Abdul Aziz stopped beside him.

"Look!" said the old man, and he made a sweeping gesture before him.

Abdul Aziz looked. Below him, in a great circle cut by the waters deep into the red earth that is below the sands, lay a paradise of waving date palms, banana and fig trees, beneath which were lush gardens of bright green barely, vegetables and flowers. Between the gardens, flowing everywhere in a mad profusion, were the streams of living waters that cascaded and bubbled with a tinkling sound. Here and there they spread to little lakes and the boy could see, tiny as ants from this height, bevies of children and donkeys

that splashed in the water merrily. After the hot dry blare of the desert the sight was like drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry.

Abdul Aziz took a deep breath and felt the air cool in his nostrils. Deep within him it seemed that a small voice spoke to him, with a sort of finality. "Here," said the voice, "is your home, for which you have been searching always." The boy sighed and closed his eyes.

The next day he went a little way across the desert to meet his mother. When he came to the caravan he saw that Youssef was riding beside his mother's camel, looking up at her and talking. And she smiled down on him from the swaying saddle with happiness in her eyes.

"Mother," said Abdul Aziz simply, when he had greeted them, "I know what I want to do with my money. I want to buy a garden in Nefta, and live here always."

Kadijah and Youssef looked at one another, a long look. Then the man spoke.

"It is well, my son," he said. "Your mother and I are to be married. We will live with you, and together we will work the garden. May Sidi Bou Ali, the sacred marabout of Nefta, grant us joy!"

"Then, by the Prophet, I ask nothing more!" cried the boy, and he kissed Youssef's robe. He would have like to kiss his mother too, but the camel was too high and he could only touch the end of her fingers.

"Allah is good," said Abdul Aziz.

A few days later the marriage took place. The fantasia was a very grand affair. Kadijah, dressed in beautiful embroidered garments and wearing many pounds of new silver jewelry, was paraded through the streets of the little town, which hangs on the red earth above the oasis, on a high and swaying camel. Beside her rode the Bedouins, each on a magnificent charger caparisoned with gay saddles and many-colored saddle cloths so long that they swept the ground behind. Youssef headed the band, bathed and barbered and gorgeously dressed, and the boy thought as he looked at him that he could not desire a finer father. As they rode the men did daring feats of horsemanship, sitting the rearing and plunging chargers with grave impassive faces. And all the while they fired their guns into the air, and shrill music

of flute and drum echoed through the narrow red-brown streets.

Abdul Aziz, riding proudly his fine saddle studded with silver, and clothed in a new orange bournous, thought that his cup was full.

It was several weeks later that the boy, walking along one of the paths that run between the gardens, came suddenly on an old friend. The man was sitting on a little bridge that crossed one of the streams, and he was painting a picture. The boy stopped, hardly believing his eyes. It was the artist from "everywhere, and nowhere" whom he had met years before in Hammamet when the bubbling camel barred the way.

The man was absorbed in his work and again, being an Arab, the boy waited patiently till he had done. Then he spoke.

"Once, long ago, you knew me in Hammamet," he said. "We met a camel. Do you remember?"

The man looked at him, at first in surprise, then with a sudden smile. "Of course!" he answered. "You are Abdul Aziz! But what are you doing here?"

"Come with me," said the boy. "I have something to tell you, and something to show you."

Walked between the cactus hedges.

So the two of them walked together between the cactus hedges to the green garden which the boy had bought with his money. As they went Abdul Aziz told all that had befallen him, and the man listened, delighted. When the tale was finished they had already reached the garden.

It lay at the extreme edge of the oasis, and from a very fertile strip at one end, it stretched away to the edge of the desert which here is flush with the gardens. Here at the edge the palms were smaller in size and fewer in number, and finally they stopped altogether. Beyond them lay the great Sahara, grey and tan and mauve, shimmering in the light; and it stretched away over the rim of the world.

The two stood under the last tree, looking out across the sand. Beside them the Son of Satan munched contentedly on a piece of young cactus.

"Abdul Aziz," said the man seriously, "are you going to help your people, as you once promised me, so that they may become again the great race they once were?"

The boy's face grew very red, and he stood struggling to put into words the deep thing that was in him.

"Yes, if Allah wills it, I am!" he answered. "I am too good a son of the desert to wish to leave it altogether. But I was born in Hammamet and I love the gardens. Here I shall stay. And here, do you see, if I work hard and dig a very deep well, I can make my garden bigger and steal a little bit from the desert to make it blossom and grow green. The desert will not mind. It is so big."

"No," the man smiled, "the desert will not mind."

"And," went on the boy with shining eyes, "I will work hard and I will study—already I can read and write, I only and my grandfather of the tribe—. ·d when I grow up I will help the others. I swear it by the head of my father."

The ıan looked across the desert for a long time in silence. Then he said softly. "In such a garden once the Prophet lived, with another Kadijah. Listen!"

Very faint and far away, like a bell on the still air, came the voice of the muezzin. "La il-la il la Allah!" he sang. "There is but one God, and Mohammed is his Prophet!"

"Mektoub! What is to be, is written!" said Abdul Aziz.

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